The Fantastic Four

screenplay by

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based on the characters created by
Stan Lee
and
Jack Kirby

© 2002
Revised First Draft
February 22, 2002

FADE IN:

On black screen, in reverent silence, we see the words:

This movie is dedicated to

Stan "The Man" Lee

Jack "King" Kirby

And True Believers everywhere...

And that's the last reverent silence we're ever gonna get, because now we smash cut to:

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - DAY

Feet. Lots of them. All kinds, too. Wearing high heels, dress shoes, cheap sneakers, cross-trainers, work boots, sandals or just plain bare feet - you name it - every pair of feet imaginable. And they're all running.

We're in the middle of a human stampede. It's so chaotic it takes a minute to get our bearings. We realize we're in the streets of midtown Manhattan on a beautiful spring day.

The sun beams, the skyscrapers glisten, and the clouds above are full and fluffy - but down here in the streets, it's like the running of the bulls in Pamplona.

BUSINESSMEN, TRAFFIC COPS, HOT DOG VENDORS, YUPPIES, DRUG DEALERS, SECRETARIES, NEWSCASTERS, SHOE-SHINE GUYS, TOURISTS - everyone, basically - is running towards the same event. All the New Yorkers elbow and jockey one another for position like teenagers rushing a rock concert. It's frenzied but never violent. Everybody's too happy and excited for that.

One clueless GUY walks out of his office building, engrossed in today's paper. He nearly gets bowled over by the crowd. Holding onto his hat, the guy looks around all the rushing bodies for some explanation - when a SHOPKEEPER yells over his shoulder as he passes:

SHOPKEEPER
The Fantastic Four are coming!

Say no more - the guy drops his paper and, grinning like a kid just let out of school, joins the running crowd.

We follow with the crowd as its numbers swell, spilling over onto the sidewalks, filling the streets, rushing over cars stuck in traffic, and finally turning a corner ...

... coming to a dead stop at a set of hastily set-up police barricades. Suddenly jam-packed together, folks in the crowd jump up and over one another, straining for a good view. Lifting disposable cameras above their heads ...

Pushing past the barricades, we see what they see: It's no rock concert. More like a lethal battle zone. Chaos. NEW YORK CITY POLICE, wearing kevlar riot gear and helmets, lie scattered about the sectioned-off area. They are under attack. Pinned down, outgunned, and under heavy fire.

Their enemy: a highly organized, well-armed group of five UNIFORMED BANK ROBBERS. The bad guys wear headsets, black masks, and tote state-of-the-art assault weaponry.

And in the middle of the fighting, right in the street between the cops and the robbers, lies the big prize: a hijacked BRINKS TRUCK, lying on its side like a wounded elephant, its back doors ripped open. Millions of dollars in cash lie out in plain sight, spilled out like guts.

The robbers move like a well-rehearsed unit. Three of them pin down the cops with a barrage of machine gun fire, blasting holes in the NYPD squad cars and shattering glass. The remaining two unfurl neatly-rolled bags, and start stashing the cash. It's all going smoothly, according to plan - until one of the robbers notices the cash starts blowing away. A little at first, then a lot. There is a steady gust of air, coming from above, and growing ...

The crowd starts a cheer that grows from loud to thunderous. This is gonna be good. The LEAD ROBBER looks up to see:

The incredible sight of the FANTASTIC FOUR descending upon him. They land on the street with a whoosh of compressed air in the FANTASTICAR - a futuristic cross between the space shuttles of tomorrow and a sensible family vehicle of today.

As they land, we get a good look at the Fantastic Four for the brief micro-instant before they launch into action. There's REED RICHARDS (MR. FANTASTIC): 40. Trim, handsome, with a touch of gray and eyes that blaze a keen intelligence. SUSAN STORM (THE INVISIBLE GIRL): late 20s. A wholesome, voluptuous blonde with just a hint of bad girl behind her smile. JOHNNY STORM (THE HUMAN TORCH): early 20s. Thirsty for action, cockier than he should be, and teen-idol handsome. Finally there's THE THING. A blue-eyed, cigar-chomping behemoth made entirely of orange rock.

Stunned, the robbers break off their firefight and re-group. Their leader doesn't hesitate - he just barks the command:

LEADER
Fire!

As one, the bank robbers open gunfire on the Fantastic Four. Instantly, four things happen at once:

1. Johnny bursts into flame and flies straight out of the Fantasticar, circling high above the crowd like a flaming bird of prey, trailing flame and smoke behind him.

2. Sue lowers her head in concentration and spreads both arms, palms out. As she does so, she disappears, turning invisible as a shimmering invisible barrier instantly surrounds the Fantasticar. A hail of machine gun bullets hit the barrier and ricochet off.

3. Reed stretches his entire torso out, elongating himself ten yards in front of the barricaded crowd. Lighting-fast, his stretched torso spreads like a sail, catching the ricocheted bullets before they hit the crowd. We see each bullet's trajectory mapped out on his back, which stretches like rubber. The bullets all harmlessly fall to the street.

4. The Thing leaps out of the Fantasticar and rushes the robbers. Pounding like a fullback the size of a small dinosaur, his every footstep makes the ground shake.

The crowd's looking forward to this ...

CROWD
Ooooh ...

The Thing leaps in one bound atop the overturned truck. He digs his big rocky paw into the metal siding and rips, peeling the steel side of the truck away more easily than most guys could crush a beer can. The Thing yanks two terrified robbers from out of the truck, holds them dangling in mid-air. He smiles. The crowd screams.

CROWD
(continuing)
Aaaahhh ... !

The Thing's smile disappears when he realizes those aren't "fun" screams - they're the screams of a crowd that's just noticed what The Thing's now seeing:

That the Lead Robber has just picked up a rocket launcher - and it's aimed at The Thing.

THING
Aw, crap.

BOOM! The rocket launcher fires. The metallic explosive blasts The Thing square in his rocky chest and ricochets crazily off. The two-ton Thing gets sent hurtling off his feet, rocketing past the cops. He smashes painfully into a brick storefront, crumbling the cement.

CROWD
Awwww ...

The rocket itself zig-zags through the sky, darting past the crowd, then cork-screwing straight up - then heading straight towards a second-story storefront.

Inside the big glass storefront, terrified EMPLOYEES watch, wide-eyed as the rocket zooms in at them ...

The rocket rushes to impact point when, at the last possible second, a ball of flame shoots from out from nowhere and melts the metal rocket to liquid slag in mid-air.

Johnny Storm, the Human Torch, his entire body ablaze, hovers in mid-air watching his handiwork. Pretty good. He turns to see, inside the storefront, a pretty young SALESGIRL catch his eye. Still hovering, he cocks his finger like a gun and blows out the flame on his finger.

The girl laughs coquettishly. Johnny gives her a grin. The crowd below screams. Johnny looks down to see:

The molten liquid metal he created is falling onto the crowd of innocent bystanders below.

We follow the burning liquid metal straight down onto the screaming, open-mouthed onlookers below. No way out. But in the last second before impact, an invisible DOME BARRIER erects over the screaming crowd. The burning metal hits the dome and harmlessly sloughs off to the sides. Street tar boils on impact. The crowd is safe. Confused, they all look to each other. One guy speaks up:

DELI OWNER
Wh-what just happened?

Sue, the Invisible Girl, materializes next to him, smiles:

SUE
Honey, I just happened.

A TABLOID PHOTOGRAPHER rushes up to Sue and aims his camera. He snaps her picture - one split second after she turns invisible again.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Damn.

The cops surround the would-be-robbers and secure the Brinks Truck. Three of the robbers are now flat on the ground, getting cuffed.

The last two, however, break from the scene and run for it. We follow them as they bolt past the barricades, into the crowd, pushing and shoving their way past innocent people.

What the robbers don't see is a hand, darting through the crowd after them, following wherever they go like a heat-seeking missile, zig-zagging along ...

One of the robbers looks over his shoulder as he runs, sees the hand following him, and runs faster. The crowd laughs and applauds, watching. The two robbers make it to a clearing on the street. One turns to the other, both out of breath.

ROBBER
Think we lost it?

The other robber nods - just as the hand bursts from the crowd. Before the robbers can take a single step, the arm wraps itself around the first robber's neck in multiple loops, then squeezes like a python. The second robber, frozen in fear, gets slapped three times hard with the open hand, then - no more fooling around - punched with a heavyweight hook. The two robbers fall to the ground. NYPD officers quickly cuff them. The hand recoils, back to Reed Richards, regaining his normal shape.

Mission accomplished, The Fantastic Four re-group in the middle of the street. The barricades give way and their fans rush to mob them like they're the Beatles. The group tries to get back to the Fantasticar, but can't. A group of GIRLS surround Johnny, screaming and shoving 8x10s at him to sign.

GIRLS
Johnny! Johnny, I love you! Can I get an autograph?

Reed and Sue are also mobbed by flashbulb-popping PAPARAZZI. They both look a little overwhelmed.

REPORTERS
Reed Richards! Susan! Are you getting married? Are you splitting up? And what's really going on inside the Baxter Building?

The Thing, meanwhile, is surrounded by mullet-wearing WWF-type fans.

FANS
Yo, Thing! You rule! You gotta do, like the Iron Man competition dude, 'cause you would, like ... rule!

THING
Ah, you know, a guy like me ...

As he talks, The Thing casually reaches down, grabs hold of the overturned Brinks Truck and lifts it upright.

THING
(continuing)
... I don't like showing off.

The Thing catches Reed's eye across the crowd. Reed nods to Sue. Sue concentrates, and a shimmering invisible barrier emerges, gently separating the Fantastic Four from their fans, clearing a path to the Fantasticar. They all make their way back. Except Johnny, mesmerized by the pretty girls surrounding him.

GIRL
Sign me?

A bosomy BLONDE hands Johnny a felt tip marker - and rips open her blouse (we don't see boobs, but Johnny sure does).

He starts to sign when The Thing wearily walks past, grabs Johnny without looking, and carries him along - a full foot off the ground. The girls groan as Johnny gets taken away.

Sue, Reed, Johnny and The Thing get in the Fantasticar. The Thing at the controls, Reed riding shotgun, Johnny and Sue in back. The Thing hits the Fantasticar's thrusters and they rise up. The crowd cheers as the FF fly up and away.

Beat. Some crowd members hold up lighters for an encore.

EXT. SKIES OF MANHATTAN - DAY

We see the Fantasticar GLIDE up, away from the crowd, rise to the heights of the skyscrapers. Making one loop over the gleaming MANHATTAN SKYLINE, the Fantasticar heads for ...

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - DAY

The Baxter Building. Midtown headquarters of the Fantastic Four. The Fantasticar lands squarely on its rooftop landing site. The site descends into the bowels of the building.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING ENTRANCE CORRIDOR - DAY

The Fantastic Four silently walk through the main entrance corridor. They pass through a series of security points, each time, another enormous white door opens automatically.

Looking as bold, united and impressive as a team of "Right Stuff" astronauts, the team stride as one, passing through the final, gleaming white security doorway ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - DAY

This final entrance seals shut behind them. The Fantastic Four now stand inside the Baxter Building's Main Room - A futuristic science lab that's part suburban family living room, part NASA headquarters. The second this final door whooshes shut, there is a beat of silence ...

And it's shattered when the four of them all start talking at once and doing their own thing - just like a family. Reed tries in vain to control the traffic.

REED
Nice work, everybody. Quick team meeting and then we can ...

Johnny flies past Reed, leaving a mid-air flame trail behind him. The Thing casually shoves aside an enormous piece of complex-looking science equipment, revealing a plain old refrigerator. He opens it as Sue floats by on a cushion of shimmering invisible air, letting her hair down ...

JOHNNY
Fan mail in yet?

SUE
I call first shower.

THING
Save a little hot water this time, huh, Suzie? Hey, who ate the last enchilada?

JOHNNY
You believe the bootleggers hawking those cheap "F.F." shirts? We should be getting a piece of that ...

REED
Really. Everyone. Just a quick debriefing and then ...

SUE
Is it me, or does everyone else's uniform itch?

The Thing accidentally pulls the fridge door off its hinges.

THING
I'm ordering pizza.

SUE
I'd love to wear something that breathes, you know, like cotton.

THING
At least you got uniforms. Me, I get the swim trunks.

Johnny, reading a Teen Fan magazine with his face on the cover, pulls out the paper subscription forms, crumples them up and - Fwoosh! - ignites them.

JOHNNY
It brings out your girlish figure. You think we made networks?

Johnny grabs a TV remote and flips on an entire wall of TV monitors. Throughout the scene, Johnny channel surfs.

REED
(to Johnny)
Johnny, not so close, you'll ruin your eyes.
(to Sue)
The uniform's designed with unstable molecular structures to accommodate our respective abilities ...
(more)

REED (cont'd)
(to Thing)
... And you can not order pizza to the Baxter Building!

Sue slides off the force-cushion and sidles up to Reed.

SUE
Ooh. Delivery's bad?

REED
Sue, you didn't.

SUE
(by rote)
I know, I know, high security area, zero risk environment, but come on, Reed. The boys burned some calories.

JOHNNY/THING
Thank you, Sue.

SUE
Besides ...

She puts her arms around Reed, purrs:

SUE
(continuing)
You used to like pizza, back in the old day, when we were just plain old space jockeys .... remember?

REED
(caving in)
... Mushroom, half pineapple, extra green pepper?

Sue nods. Reed sighs.

REED
(continuing)
All right. But one of these days we have to get serious. Ben?

The Thing effortlessly lifts an entire multi-ton bank of monitors over to Reed, who stretches his arms to manipulate them simultaneously.

JOHNNY
Reed's right. My publicist says we can sell ad space on our uniforms, so let's talk seriously. Names. I'm the Human Torch 'cause I burst into flame and fly around. Good. People get that. Invisible Girl - self explanatory. The Thing is, let's face it, a giant thing ...

Still fussing with the fridge door, The Thing growls at Johnny, mock-menacing ...

JOHNNY
(continuing)
Of beauty, to be sure, But Reed? You stretch. You're like Silly Putty if it got all serious. So how come you get to call yourself ...

THING
"Mr. Fantastic?"

Johnny and The Thing stifle laughs. Reed looks confused and a bit stung. Sue, arms still around Reed, says a smile:

SUE
Guys. The man who can mold his body into any shape and have it stay that way as long as he wants? Trust me: he's Mr. Fantastic.

Reed, blushing but grateful, gives Sue a kiss.

JOHNNY
Eew! And that's way too much information for baby brother.

SUE
(smiling)
Oh, right! Like you can talk; Johnny Storm, the groupie's friend.

JOHNNY
Reed, that reminds me: can I borrow the Fantasticar tonight?

REED
Let me think. No.

JOHNNY
Aw, come on! I go out, I meet girls, they like me, a little vibe gets going and when I try bringing 'em back to the Baxter Building - I can't get my date past security!

As Reed talks to Johnny, he concentrates on the monitors. We see what he sees: a PIZZA GUY holding nine pies, standing in the lobby. One camera shows his photo image. One shows his infrared readout. One shows his DNA breakdown. One shows his skeletal X-Ray. They all show digital information ...

Finally, the images interlock and read "IDENTITY CONFIRMED."

REED
I sympathize. I do. But we have to maintain a controlled environment.

JOHNNY
No fair. You already got your girl.

Johnny ignites, flies casually up and away, toward The Thing.

JOHNNY
(continuing)
... And she's my sister, which is, quite frankly, disgusting. Benjy. What do you say? You and me. Torch, Thing. Hitting the clubs, breaking some hearts ... we gotta!

THING
You go. Good looking guy like me? I don't want to steal your fan base.

JOHNNY
Ben ... You know how many fine young available hotties there are in New York, all of them just dying to get themselves a piece of the rock?

The Thing hears Sue's voice:

SUE (V.O.)
Johnny's got a point, Ben.

She appears right next to him.

SUE
A girl'd have to be blind not to go after a big ol' catch like you.

She gives The Thing a friendly kiss on the cheek. He blushes to a slightly darker shade of orange rock. And suddenly, Reed's arms wrap around Sue. He playfully pulls her to him.

REED
You stealing my girl?

Ding! The security, vault-like doors open on the Baxter Building elevator, revealing the freaked-out looking PIZZA GUY. He holds nine pies stacked high.

PIZZA GUY
Delivery for, uh ... "The Fantastic Four." You the Fantastic Four?

And reverse angle reveals: a flaming man in mid-air, a man of rock, a half-invisible woman and a guy with arms stretching across the room.

THING
Just missed 'em, kid. We're the X-Men. Ah, just yanking your chain, what's the damage?
(patting his uniform)
You think they'd build these things with pockets ...

The Thing pays and eagerly takes his pizzas as Pizza Guy leaves, grumbling about his lousy tip. He gets back in the elevator, which pneumatically seals shut with a "whoosh!"

REED
Johnny, Ben, if you are going out tonight - take these.

Reed stretches his reach fifteen feet across the room, handing Johnny and The Thing each a small high-tech device the size of a cell phone.

JOHNNY
New gizmos? Reed, I thought you invented everything already.

REED
Digital video comlinks. Specially designed to recognize and respond only to this team's unique DNA codes.

SUE
Smart *is* sexy.

REED
It's time we did something to stay unified.

JOHNNY
What's that supposed to mean?

REED
We don't act as a team, people.

THING
Well, technically? We're not even "people."

The Thing starts eating his pizza "New York style," that is, folded in half. But not slices. Whole pies.

REED
I'm serious. We never train, we barely get by ... You know how lucky we are to survive every time we go into action? Or the odds of us killing some innocent bystanders? Johnny, your flirting nearly cost lives out there. And Ben, you wouldn't have to take close range rocket shots that cause six-figure property damage - if we could just learn to control our powers - and work together.

Beat. They all look properly chastised and serious. Until Johnny looks at the bank of TV monitors - and sees himself.

JOHNNY
Hey - we're on TV!

And just like that, they abandon Reed. Johnny flies to the couch, sits. Sue and The Thing join him, watching. The Thing scrunches in next to Johnny, tipping up the entire couch up. Johnny cranks the volume. We see a NEWS ANCHOR reporting from the demolished street.

NEWS ANCHOR
... the scene from midtown Manhattan today where the "Fantastic Four" just thwarted yet another attempted bank
(more)

NEWS ANCHOR (cont'd)
robbery, their fifteenth public rescue in the last calendar year. Still, questions surround this so-called super group - in response to viewer demand, Eyewitness News presents this special report: The Fantastic Four: Who they are. And how they came to be.

THING
Ooh. Mysterious.

Johnny reaches for a slice. The Thing slaps his hand away.

NEWS ANCHOR
What began eighteen months ago, when Dr. Reed Richards led his research team to investigate a mysterious power source in outer space was to end in triumph. And tragedy.

On TV, we see stock footage of Reed, Sue, Johnny and human BEN GRIMM, dressed in astronaut gear, entering a high-tech space capsule. Finally, they are joined by a darkly handsome man who stands apart from them. This is VICTOR.

NEWS ANCHOR
Joining the group was fifth team member Victor Von Doom, the so-called "Playboy Prince," of Latveria. A brilliant physicist in his own right, Von Doom was the only member of that ill-fated voyage not to survive.

The room gets quiet. Everyone looks to Reed. His face shows no emotion. The TV news report gets loud and "upbeat:"

NEWS ANCHOR
And the four who lived were forced to endure a powerful transformation when their ship was bombarded with what scientists call "cosmic rays."

REED
Particle waves. Particle waves! No scientist calls it that, why do they always get it wrong?

On TV, a cheesy computer graphic illustrates a space ship as red light-waves pass through it. Then, NASA stock footage shows Reed, Sue, and Johnny having their respective powers

tested by a bunch of LAB COATS in a sterile environment. Reed stretches for them. Johnny ignites. Sue knocks over test blocks, then turns invisible. The lab coats take notes.

SUE
Nice hairdo, Susan ...

NEWS ANCHOR
Dubbing themselves Mr. Fantastic, The Invisible Girl and the Human Torch. The group quickly adapted to life with super powers. All but one.

On TV, we see The Thing enraged, scaring the lab coat guys who run from the room as he pounds holes in cement walls.

NEWS ANCHOR
(continuing)
Pilot Benjamin Grimm, now know as The Thing, became the only group member unable to live out a normal life, having transformed into a three-ton living mass of impenetrable rock.

THING
Three tons? Two point five. Tops.

He sucks in his gut, checks himself out. Lets it go. We see shaky-camera news footage of the Fantastic Four fighting in the streets - today's bank robbery.

NEWS ANCHOR
Under Dr. Richards' guidance, the Fantastic Four's stated goals are those of peace, and scientific exploration. However. Controversy, and curiosity, run high.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

An elevator dings open. Pizza Guy, looking shifty, turns on a light switch - and gasps. He is standing in the Baxter Building's secret experiment room. Dwarfed by a room full of unbelievably complex, oversized machines. Geek heaven.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
... With New York newspapers offering up to one million dollars for photographic proof of what's really going on inside the Baxter Building.

The Pizza Guy takes out a little plastic camera. Starts snapping photos ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Johnny keeps reaching for pizza, The Thing keeps sliding it out of reach as he munches slices stacked three-high. On TV, we see a stern-looking US ARMY GENERAL being interviewed.

GENERAL
The military has no idea what experiments are being conducted in the Baxter Building, and these people are their own "superpower." Could the U.S. military take them out?
(beat)
We have a scenario for that.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

The Pizza Guy snaps picture after picture of all the technology around him ... until the COMPUTER speaks.

COMPUTER
Welcome to Baxter Building Security software. Please state your name, purpose, and destination.

PIZZA GUY
Up yours, "Threepio."

COMPUTER
That is an invalid response.

And instantly, the walls come alive as a dozen gun-ports whip open - and fire. Pizza Guy is immediately surrounded by a deadly cage of criss-crossing laser beams. Alarms blare.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

The Thing's down to his last pizza. Johnny tries to grab it. Still watching TV, the group hears the alarm go off.

THING
Tourist.

SUE
I got it.

Sue wearily stands, heads toward the elevator banks. Johnny grabs the last pizza and flies off with it. The Thing,

playing, picks up ... the couch. He swats at Johnny, who teases him, flying just out of reach with every swing ...

THING
Gimme that back, Tinkerbell, I'm still hungry.

REED
Boys ...

JOHNNY/BEN
He started it!

They continue rough-housing as SMASH! The TV report ends - because The Thing just bashed the couch through the monitor.

SUE
It's gonna lead to tears ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

The Pizza Guy's trapped by lasers. Then they shut off. His camera seems to float away from him. The film gets removed.

SUE (V.O.)
You know, you're very lucky.

Susan appears in mid-air beside Pizza Guy. She keeps the film, hands back the camera, and "escorts" him out with a shimmering invisible force field at his back ...

SUE
The last guy who tried this got encased in a block of ice. Freeze ray. And props for trying but next time? We'll order Chinese.

Ding! The elevator doors shut on the terrified Pizza Guy.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Johnny's still teasing - playing as The Thing keeps swinging at him with the couch. Johnny ignites his hands - and the pizza gets burnt to a crisp instantly. Ash falls to the ground. Laughing, The Thing picks up the couch and heaves it at Johnny. Johnny dodges. The couch smashes into a bank of controls. Shorting them out. Lights flicker on and off ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

Electricity throughout the building goes haywire. Machines turn on and off. Pneumatic doors open and shut.

Stuck between floors in the elevator, Pizza Guy gets on his knees and loads fresh film in his cheap camera ... One door across from him fritzes out - and opens up. Whatever's inside lights up Pizza Guy's face with an unearthly glow. His eyes go wide ...

And - snap! - he takes a picture.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed separates Johnny and The Thing with both arms, shoving them twenty feet apart just as a video intercom comes to life, showing the irate face of MR. BUSCEMA, their landlord.

MR. BUSCEMA
Richards! This is your landlord! And what the hell you got going on up there, elephant aerobics?

REED
Sorry, Mr. Buscema.

MR. BUSCEMA
Sorry my eye! I knew I should never have rented to super types, you're worse than those Aerosmith people ...

Sue re-enters, shuts off the intercom with a thought pebble.

SUE
Know-it-all. When are they going to stop trying to push you around? Honestly, you'd think Victor was still around ...

The instant Sue says "Victor," Reed stiffens. Johnny and The Thing take their cue from Sue - by quietly leaving.

REED
I have to get back to work.

SUE
Oh Reed. You know I didn't mean ...

REED
Alone.

Without another word Reed turns his back on Susan and strides through one of the hydraulic doorways. Alone.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REED'S STUDY - DAY

Reed straps himself into a chair and operates a series of switches. The chair rises up, taking him to a 360-degree bank of high-tech monitors which eerily underlight his face. Reed stretches out his arms, manipulates switches.

Reed studies the monitors. We see, taped next to one of them, a newspaper clipping shows five astronauts at a launch pad. They are Reed, Ben Grimm, Johnny, Sue, and Victor. Reed shuts his eyes, and remembers. We flashback to:

EXT. SPACE - EARTH ORBIT - DAY

A futuristic-looking space shuttle slowly rotates in space, heading out its docking bay and into deep orbit.

SUE (V.O.)
Space shuttle *Diana* now clear of orbital pull. We're ready to roll.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTROL CABIN - DAY

Inside the shuttle. Ben pilots the ship (this is the our first good look at The Thing in human form. Solid, early 30s, built like a rugby player). Beside him, Sue copilots. Reed enters the control cabin, beaming at his old friend.

REED
This is it, Ben. The moment we've been planning for ... how long?

BEN
Since college, Methuselah. And I gotta hand it to ya. This ship? It's one hell of a design, doctor.

REED
Want to take her out, pilot?

Ben smiles, takes the controls ... then hesitates.

BEN
Can't believe this. I've flown every kind of crate from two-man props to the F-16. This? First time I've been nervous.

Reed follows Ben's gaze, through the view screen before him. We see what they see: the majesty of open space.

REED
Not me. I know there's no better man for the job. Take us out, Ben.

BEN
Aye aye ... Captain.

Johnny, the engineer, floats by in zero G, holding a clipboard and checking instruments, pulling himself along ladder rungs to a connecting passage tube of the shuttle.

JOHNNY
And how's she handling, big guy?

BEN
Like a dream, Johnny boy.

JOHNNY
Don't let him take us on any joyrides now, Sis.

SUE
I'll do what I can. Reed, we should be reaching anomaly point five minutes ahead of schedule.

JOHNNY
I'll prep the starboard camera units.

But Johnny is stopped cold by a voice that cuts through the atmosphere like a knife.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Don't bother.

The four of them turn to see: Victor. His back turned to us, silhouetted by the electronic blue glow from a bank of monitors. His back still to us, Victor continues.

VICTOR
It already taken care of.

Reed shares a look with the others. Then enters the data center bay, alone.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DATA CENTER - DAY

Reed straps himself in next to ... VICTOR. The man with the most perfect face you will ever see. Mid-30s, with piercing eyes and the cold, predatory smile of a wolf. He speaks with a slight accent.

VICTOR
I thought I would save time by taking the liberty. With your permission, of course, Doctor.

REED
You know I hate to stand on formality, Victor. But in your case? Call me "Captain."

Touche. Victor looks to Reed. Reed coolly holds his gaze. Johnny enters, upside-down, floats beside Reed and Victor. The kid senses the tension instantly, tries cutting through:

JOHNNY
Staring contest? Huh. Know what you ought to try sometime, Vic? Air hockey. There's the sport of kings.

REED
Victor's not King, Johnny.

VICTOR
Not yet.

JOHNNY
King of Latveria ... Bratwurst. Lederhosen. Hot and cold running *frauleins*. We gotta party there, Vic.

VICTOR
I'll check my calendar.

JOHNNY
Do that. And really, who cares if the Girl Scouts could kick your country's ass in a war? The exchange rate alone is worth the ...

VICTOR
Latveria may not be a military colossus as is your United States, but I've learned to accept that.
(beat)
We can't all be super powers.

REED
We don't all want to be super powers.

JOHNNY
Yeah right. Oh, Sue says we're approaching event horizon ahead of schedule. Thought you genius guys would like to know.

REED
Get me visual.

JOHNNY
I'm on it.

Johnny pulls himself away through zero gravity.

VICTOR
Is he always that annoying?

REED
He's young. And yes.

VICTOR
Reed, you and I, men of science, we understand the magnitude of the Particle Wave we're about to see. We know what it is. And what it can do. Don't you ever stop to wonder if it's too important to trust to - them?

He indicates Johnny, Sue and Ben. Johnny's doing a zero-G flip by the consoles, Sue laughs, Ben bats him away.

REED
They're my team, Victor.

VICTOR
Did Einstein have a team? Galileo? Newton, Hawking ... ?

REED
Don't know. Maybe they should have. I need my group, Victor.

VICTOR
And therein lies your weakness. Reed: In solitude lies strength.

Reed's taken aback by Victor's intensity, when:

SUE (O.S.)
Visual's up.

REED
Patch it.

View screen's metal shields part before Victor and Reed - revealing the PARTICLE WAVE. The most awe-inspiring sight the cosmos can offer. A multicolored mass of light and energy - an angry inferno which takes over the starry sky.

SUE (O.S.)
You getting this? Little scary.

VICTOR
It's beautiful.

REED
Looks more active than we thought. Keep me posted. Out.
(to Victor)
Victor, if this wave turns out to have half the potential we calculated - we go into history as the men who replaced solar, nuclear and fossil fueled energies forever.

VICTOR
If that's all what you want to use it for.

REED
What else would you use it for?

Victor does not answer. Reed, uneasy, looks to his old friend for some assurance - when suddenly the entire cabin shakes violently. Hit hard by an outside force.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTROL CABIN - DAY

As the cabin shudders, Sue checks controls.

JOHNNY
What the hell was that?

SUE
It's not internal, whatever it was - all hands, strap in.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DATA CENTER - DAY

Victor and Reed compete, manipulating their readout screens.

REED
Johnny! Sue! I need broad-spectrum analysis of everything going on in and around that particle wave - get me data, now!

Reed watches Sue, Johnny and Ben work feverishly to get him the information, then turns to Victor, working coolly alone.

VICTOR
A "team effort?"

REED
You know a better way?

Victor already has the data locked on his screen.

VICTOR
It would seem, I do. Data locked.

SUE
I'd like to know just what the hell we're going into here!

Reed and Victor scramble through zero-G into ...

INT SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTROL CABIN - DAY

The main cabin where all five crew members jam together.

VICTOR
It's a confluence.

BEN
Want to translate that for me?

VICTOR
We came looking for a wave. That - is a Tsunami.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

The wave is growing.

Rising like an ocean wave of fire. The wave grows in mass, hurtling forward. Building up, curling over like an ocean wave, dwarfing the tiny shuttle, raising a horrible roar that defies the vacuum of space to become deafening ...

It's "The Perfect Storm" in space ...

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTROL CABIN - DAY

The crew watches in awe. Wave images fill every screen.

REED
This isn't supposed to be happening.

VICTOR
And yet it is.

SUE
It's coming at us, head-on.

The crew watches the particle wave grow before them, onscreen, their faces illuminated by its hot glow.

JOHNNY
So what do we do?

They turn to Reed for an answer. But for a moment - just a split-second - Reed cannot speak. Stunned by the size of the event, the sheer unknown of it, Reed's a deer in headlights.

REED
I ... I didn't plan for this.

The ship rocks again - harder this time. And it doesn't stop. The whole cabin vibrates with increasing violence.

BEN
Somebody give me an order.

VICTOR
Full throttle - straight ahead.

JOHNNY
Are you insane?

VICTOR
Fly through it. Straight. We'll come out the other side, suffer minimal exposure. Do it!

Reed snaps out of it. Barks an order:

REED
No! Ben. Turn around. Now!

VICTOR
Go in!

REED
Go back!

REED/VICTOR
It's our only chance!

BEN
Vic's right, we gotta go through this thing, hope our shields hold.

REED
They won't withstand it!

BEN
You built 'em, Reed!

REED
Not for this!

VICTOR
Benjamin - Listen to me.

REED
I am in charge here!

JOHNNY
Impact - twenty seconds.

BEN
Somebody make the call ...

SUE
Lost room to maneuver ...

BEN
And there goes manual ...

Victor lunges forward, pushing himself between Ben and Sue and physically grabs the ship's controls.

VICTOR
Fly straight through it!

JOHNNY
Ten seconds ...

Reed grabs Victor - rough. Pulls him off the controls.

REED
Prepare the escape pod!

VICTOR
No!

Victor punches Reed. Tries clawing his way past, back to the control panel, Reed slams Victor up against a cabin wall.

REED
Goddamnit Victor when I give a direct order you will take it!

JOHNNY
Impact.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

The Wave consumes the shuttle. The Wave wields the full furious force of nature. The shuttle is a toy. It's sent hurtling back, nose-up, backwards, flipping end-over-end ...

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - CONTROL CABIN - DAY

The shuttle crew as the deadly wave begins to engulf them. Reed and Victor in mid-fight. Reed, holding Victor, smashes him up against a wall. Victor punches Reed in the face. Reed grabs Victor in a headlock. They struggle. Sue screams as the wave begins engulfing the ship, shattering equipment and bombarding them all in a horrible red light.

Reed shatters a safety shield with his free hand and pushes the red button underneath. A pneumatic door shears open beside them and every alarm on the ship goes off at once.

On the other side of the door we see *Diana's* Escape Pod.

REED
Prepare the pod or we're all dead!

VICTOR
I'm not leaving!

REED
We are all leaving!

Reed and Victor tumble toward the escape pod hatchway. Victor trips, rolls on impact, and falls hard inside the pod.

ANGLE ON: The escape pod. Victor struggles to get out of the cramped space. He heads for the hatchway - when there is a small explosion - just above the hatchway bolts.

VICTOR
NO!

The bolts blow out into zero-G and fly past Reed - the entire pod door comes pneumatically slamming down - and locks.

Behind three-inch-thick glass, Victor pounds on the pod door, trying to get out, to get back into the shuttle ...

Reed, Sue, Johnny and Ben turn to see Victor trapped in the escape pod. Reed lunges to Victor to try to stop the shuttle from escaping. The two men face each other - separated by the glass - they both look horrified.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Reed, I don't want to ...

It's a sentence he'll never finish - Reed gets physically blasted back by an explosion of compressed air as Victor's escape pod blasts away from the shuttle.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

We see, from Reed's cramped P.O.V., the escape pod rocket away from the mother ship, become small in the distance of space, then ignite. Hitting earth atmosphere, it burns away to nothing, engulfed by flames.

Reed is helpless to stop it ...

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DAY

And now the screaming begins - and it's impossible to distinguish the wails of twisted metal from the human agony. Equipment shatters and explodes. The Wave bombards the crew in a horrible red light. The crew's bodies contort in inhuman pain and as the screaming crescendoes we cut back to:

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REED'S STUDY - DAY

Reed. Silent. Alone. Remembering.

On his monitor screens we see in-depth, 3-D medical readouts of the team: Reed, Sue, Johnny, Ben, and Victor. Complex DNA chains stand displayed beside each image.

Victor's display comes up. We see the image of his face fill the monitors all around Reed, the image rotating in three dimensional space, like ghosts haunting him. Reed presses a button and the word "DELETE?" appears over Victor's face.

Reed hits another button. And the images of Victor's face are deleted. Leaving Reed alone. Tortured ...

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. LATVERIAN VILLAGE - DAY

We see a Fed Ex truck rumble its though the dust and dirt of a small Baltic country awash in contradictions: The land and people look impoverished, but high technology abounds. Poorly dressed peasants carry cell phones and palm pilots. Satellite dishes sit atop mud and brick huts. The Fed Ex truck squeals to a stop at the base of a small hill. Atop the hill sits an ominous-looking military research facility.

FADE IN SUBTITLE: LATVERIA.

Before the dust can settle, the truck is surrounded by young boys. All of them clamoring for the driver like he's selling ice cream. The DRIVER steps out, clutching a package. All the boys surround him, grabbing him, imploring him ...

The driver has to pick one lucky boy - but which one? One catches his eye. GREGOR. Not the biggest, the strongest - but he's got that lean and hungry look - and over his right eye, a scar... The driver hands Gregor the package. The other boys groan in defeat as Gregor runs away with it, fast as a jackrabbit, up the hill, heading to the military research facility ...

Gregor wears battered, third generation Nike sneakers and a "Green Day" t-shirt. An American wannabe. He runs up the hill, picking up speed, when he's stopped by:

FATHER
Gregor!

Gregor stops, turns, sees his Dad coming. (NOTE: The following dialogue is spoken in Czech, with subtitles).

GREGOR
(bored)
Yes, father.

FATHER
Where are you going?

GREGOR
Up the hill.

FATHER
To see *him*.

GREGOR
Yes.

His father slaps him. Hard. The kid just takes it.

FATHER
Listen to me. That man is not just a man. He's not like us. He's done good things for our country, but ..

The father stops - sees he's not getting through.

FATHER
(continuing)
Go. If I can't stop you - see for yourself. You are stubborn, like your mother. And for her sake ...
(grave)
Do not look at his face.

With this, the father sadly turns and heads down the hill. Gregor watches, a little shaken, then looks back up the hill.

INT. MILITARY RESEARCH FACILITY - DAY

The knock on the door is answered by a uniformed MILITARY GUARD. We do not see all of him from Gregor's perspective - mostly just the machine-pistol hanging from his belt.

Gregor holds up the Fed Ex package like an I.D. The guard lets him in without a word. Gregor follows ...

ANGLE ON: The hallway they pass through. Young Gregor looks up in wonder at the walls around him. We see the walls: hanging upon them, like family crests or coats of arms, we see bits of space technology. From Reed's shuttle.

An astronaut's helmet. An entire section of the escape pod, labelled "*Diana*." A framed instrument panel ...

The guard suddenly stops, turns, and exits. Leaving young Gregor alone. In a dark, low-tech laboratory, filled with retro-looking but very functional equipment. Their electric glow filling the room with unhealthy light ...

And at the end of the room sits a MAN, half in shadow, his back to us, working at a lab table. On his table lie three of the most high-tech mechanical devices you've ever seen.

They are the size and general shape of Coleman lanterns, but tricked out. Evil-looking. They have no known name, so we'll call them mechanical BUGS.

The man speaks. We recognize the voice as VICTOR.

VICTOR
I know you. I've seen you. Your name is Gregor, is it not?

GREGOR
Yes. Herr Doctor.

VICTOR
You speak English. May I ask how you learned it?

GREGOR
F-from the television.

VICTOR
Clever boy. Tell me, Gregor. In the village. Do they talk about me?

Victor stands, walks toward the kid, emerging from shadow ...

VICTOR
(continuing)
Tell the truth.

Gregor reluctantly nods his head "yes."

VICTOR
(continuing)
Do they call me a monster?

Gregor, scared but unable to disobey, again nods yes.

VICTOR
(continuing)
You were told not to look at my face, weren't you?

Again, Gregor nods yes.

VICTOR
(continuing)
And yet you came. Why? Are you curious? Do you wish to tell more tales in the village? Or is it something else that compels you?

Victor steps fully out of shadow and kneels down to the kid. Victor's face is fully masked - a horrible, medieval-looking death mask covered in metallic scars and rivets.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Did you come to see my face?

Gregor cannot answer - he's frozen with fear. We see Victor, from behind, press a button at the base of his skull and his mask begins to automatically retract ...

We watch Gregor as he reacts to seeing Victor's face.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Then look upon me, young Gregor, and tell me this: Is mine the face...

Reverse angle reveals: Victor. Not a monster. His face as handsome, healthy and unblemished as ever.

VICTOR
(continuing)
... Of a monster?

Gregor smiles. Victor does too, as he takes the Fed Ex package. Victor rips it open and pours its contents across the table: American media. Videotapes of news reports, labelled "FF, 4/17," "FF, CNN, 3/27," etc. Magazines with the Fantastic Four on the cover: People, Scientific American, Time, GQ, Newsweek. The New York Times, The News, The Post.

Gregor is fascinated by the inside of Victor's mask.

GREGOR
Your mask - it fits your face.

VICTOR
More than that. It's called a compression mold. Designed it myself. I'm clever too, you see. And with this, I hold myself together.

Victor notices the scar over Gregor's right eye.

VICTOR
(continuing)
How did you get your scar?

GREGOR
Exploring.

VICTOR
Was it worth it?

GREGOR
I don't know yet.

Victor smiles. The kid reminds him of himself.

VICTOR
Brave, clever Gregor. Latveria is going to need men like you. And soon. Would you like to serve Latveria, when you are old enough?

GREGOR
Oh yes, Herr Doctor. I would very much like to serve our ...

Gregor stops in mid-sentence. Suddenly horrified. Reverse angle reveals Victor's handsome face is starting to melt, scar and lose shape, like a pumpkin rotting fast. Seams of flesh split open, run ...

We only glimpse the beginning of the phenomenon - but Gregor sees the whole thing. The kid screams. As the mask automatically starts to cover Victor's face once again, compressing the flesh to its original shape, Victor reaches out, gently places a hand on Gregor's shoulder, and then (out of frame) jerks his hand roughly aside, snapping the boy's neck. His screaming stops dead.

And we hold on Victor's masked face, his eyes burning behind the frightening face plate, as we hear:

REED (O.S.)
Goddamnit Victor ...

And we flashback to:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DAY

The shuttle crew as the deadly wave begins to engulf them. Reed and Victor in mid-fight. Now we see the same scene from Victor's point of view. Victor trying to claw his way past Reed to the control panel, Reed holding Victor in place, smashing him up against a wall ...

REED
... When I give you a direct order you will take it!

Reed grabs Victor in a headlock, and punches him in the face repeatedly with the strength of a madman. Victor struggles.

Sue screams as the wave begins engulfing the ship, shattering equipment and bombarding them all in a horrible red light.

Reed shatters a safety shield with his free hand and pushes the red button underneath. A pneumatic door shears open beside them and every alarm on the ship goes off at once.

On the other side of the door we see *Diana's* Escape Pod.

REED
(continuing)
Prepare the pod or we're all dead!

VICTOR
I'm not leaving!

REED
We are all leaving!

Reed, far stronger than Victor, manhandles Victor and shoves him bodily into the escape pod. Victor reaches back into the main cabin of the ship - when the hatchway comes slamming down upon him, sending him hurtling back with a pneumatic blast of air.

VICTOR
(pained)
NO!

Outside the three-inch-thick safety glass, Reed rushes to the pod, and peers in. His face placid, unseen by the others, etched in quiet triumph.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Reed, I don't want to ...

It's a sentence he'll never finish - as an explosion rips Victor's pod away from the safety of the mother ship ...

INT. ESCAPE POD - DAY

Victor, blown back into the escape pod, nearly unconscious, watches helplessly as the shuttle, and the wave behind it, grow smaller and smaller in his field of vision.

Weak, he holds a hand out, fingers outstretched, as if reaching for the wave itself, trying to grab hold of it ...

He ignores the chiming voice of the pod's auto-pilot:

COMPUTER
Trajectory incorrect ... impact imminent ... trajectory incorrect ... impact imminent ... trajectory ...

And the computer voice squawks off into awful silence as the pod smashes into earth atmosphere.

And starts to burn. Not like the particle wave bombardment above, but regular, old-fashioned fire. Fire that rips through the consoles, peels plastic from the padded seats and tears Victor's suit from his flesh.

Victor's handsome face blackens and peels and he screams in agony as the escape pod rockets toward earth.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The Himalayas on a cold and starry night. The peaceful scene is ripped apart as Victor's shuttle comes flaming out of the night sky and crashes into the mountain's side, melting a hundred-yard crash landing path in the snow. Then stops.

ANGLE ON: The crashed pod. Blackened, burning within. Bloody fingers force their way into the pod's hatch and painfully pull it open. A faceless figure, seen in silhouette, emerges from the flaming capsule.

The figure collapses. Then stands. And by sheer force of will, it starts to walk, haltingly, alone, down toward the lights of a distant village below ...

INT. MILITARY RESEARCH FACILITY - DAY

Victor's masked face. Calm, quiet, placid.

He strides to the American media around him. We see The Daily News front page: the picture snapped by the Pizza Guy. A machine in the Baxter Building. A metal frame containing waves of energy. The caption: "FF'S MYSTERY MACHINE?"

Victor activates his three mechanical devices, the evil-looking "Bugs." One by one their power source ignites. They lift up, hover above the table. Victor activates a switch and, as one, the Bugs fly past him.

EXT. MILITARY RESEARCH FACILITY - DAY

The Bugs fly up, building to sonic speeds and split off in three separate directions, leaving Latveria behind ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - REED'S STUDY - DAY

Reed, looking like he's been hard at work for a few hours, studies a DNA readout of The Thing. He runs repeated tests on the structural model. Weary, he rubs his eyes.

When, without his seeing it at first, a little cup of espresso floats over to Reed, as if carried by a ghost. Reed absentmindedly takes the cup as if it were the most normal thing in the world. Sips. Stops, looks at the cup. Reed sets down the espresso, looks around suspiciously.

REED
Susan?

He hears a female giggle.

REED
(continuing)
Honey, we talked about this. You're not supposed to interrupt me unless there's some real emergency.

SUE (V.O.)
There is.

Annoyed, Reed sighs and shuts off his study monitors. He presses another button and the floor below him irises open. His chair descends down through it, to the main room ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Reed descends to the main room. Looks around. No one there.

SUE (V.O.)
See my boyfriend - well, if he is my boyfriend - keeps hiding in this sad little treehouse of science doing God knows what and I think he needs a dose of reality, stat.

Reed's arms suddenly shoot out ten feet in front of him. Grabs empty air. He retracts them, listening, stalking ...

REED
Sue - come on. Stop playing.

SUE (V.O.)
I like playing.

Reed extends his arms out slowly this time, feeling his way around the room, like a bug's antennae. Probing ...

SUE (V.O.)
(continuing)
You're getting warmer. Warmer - Aah!

Reed's grabs something invisible. It struggles in his arms as he reels it in, holding the squirming handful ... And Sue materializes right there in Reed's arms. She's dressed for a night on the town in a slinky black dress.

SUE
Let's go out.

REED
I'm tempted.

SUE
Give in.

REED
I'm working.

SUE
Okay.

REED
Really? Well, huh, thank you, Susan, you know I appreciate - what is that?

As Reed's been talking, a little black book hovers up behind him, held by a shimmering invisible wave. Sue opens the book with her force-field, turning pages, perusing ...

SUE
My little black book, Professor. If you can't come out to play, I was thinking one of my many, many ex-boyfriends ... Ooh! Roget. Wonder if he's still got that loft.

Reed snatches the book from the air, closes it, and sets it aside - twenty feet across the room.

REED
Let's go out.

SUE
Genius.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Reed and Sue, dressed for a night on the town, pass through the multiple security levels of Baxter Building security. Walls open automatically for them as they breeze past, eyes only for one another, ignoring their DNA and skeletal readouts displayed on multiple monitors along the walls ...

The last barrier wall opens, revealing The Thing, coming into the building, holding a grocery bag jammed with junk food.

REED
Ben. Um ...

THING
Where you going?

REED
Out. On, um ... a date.

SUE
Well, that was the idea, but we'd love to have you along Ben, if you don't have plans.

THING
Me? Yeah, I got plans, I'm lousy with active lifestyle choices.
(dropping it)
Reed, I thought you was gonna work on, you know ... my "condition.".

Reed looks to Sue, who tries but fails to hide her disappointment. Reed's caught between Sue and The Thing.

THING
(continuing)
Nah, forget it, you don't need to explain nothing to me, Stretch. Go. Have a good time.

Reed just watches as The Thing turns his back and disappears through an automatically closing door. As he goes:

THING
(continuing)
Somebody oughtta.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - NIGHT

The Human Torch flies, blazing a trail of fire across the Manhattan skyline. He slaloms around skyscrapers, threading in and out, rolling, just digging his powers. He's free.

ANGLE ON: a WOMAN wearily puts out the last of her soaking laundry on a line to dry. The Torch zips past the wet clothes, heating up as he goes - and fwoosh! - they're all instantly dry. The woman just stares, amazed.

ANGLE ON: A couple of TAGGERS spray-paint their colors on the back of a billboard. The Torch flies past. Stops. Flies back and blasts the billboard with a spray of flame. The Taggers duck under the flamethrower jet. Then look up to see the word "TORCH!" spelled out in flaming letters.

ANGLE ON: Two COPS in their squad car, looking up in amazement, the word "TORCH!" reflected in their windshield. They take off after him, sirens blaring ...

ANGLE ON: The Human Torch flying lazily, miming the backstroke, past a group of cute female TOURISTS.

JOHNNY
Hello, Ladies ...

Their teen-fan screams get interrupted by police sirens.

JOHNNY
(continuing)
And good-bye.

The Torch blasts off, chased by the squad car. The girls all snap pictures. One swoons.

ANGLE ON: The Human Torch flying down Broadway, heading south, the police car in hot pursuit, gaining on him ...

COP ONE (O.S.)
This is seventeen, we got a high speed situation, tracking the Human Torch, I repeat, Human Torch, just passing thirty-ninth south.

The cop car gets closer and closer to Johnny as he loses altitude, flying at street level, slowing, looking worried...

Then Johnny suddenly turns around in mid-air, smiles, waves "bye-bye" to the cops - he was messing with them. In a burst of flame, he blasts off into the night sky at twice normal speed, laughing ...

The cops just sit there, lookin' dumb ...

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Big beefy BOUNCERS stand guard at one of New York City's tragically hip clubs. Young, fabulous-looking wannabes stand clustered around the velvet ropes, dying to get in.

Johnny alights in the street, his flame diminishing. He's dressed to kill in his black leather jacket. Without breaking stride he saunters through the crowd, through the ropes, past the bouncers, and into the club, lighting a pretty girl's cigarette with his flaming thumb as he goes ...

INT. BAR - NIGHT

On TV, Mike Piazza crushes a double to left field and the Mets run the bases. We're watching the game in a seedy Soho Bar. The Thing sits alone, nursing a beer.

THING
Gimme another.

The bartender reaches under the bar and hauls an entire case of beer onto the counter.

THING
(continuing)
But cut me off after three cases, huh, pal? Seventy-two's my limit.

The Thing starts ripping the tops off the first six beers when an attractive WOMAN sidles up beside him, takes a seat, and joins in watching the game. We'll call her LINDA.

LINDA
Mind if I join you?

THING
Free country.

LINDA
(to bartender)
I'll have what he's having. Only, one at a time, please.
(to Thing)
I'm Linda. Mets fan? They'll break your heart if you let them. Long history of losing. But, I like to think ...

She gets her beer.

LINDA
(continuing)
Thank you. I like to think history isn't everything. And so, masochist that I am, I spring for not one but two season tickets. Box seats.
(sips)
I usually go alone.

The Thing can't believe this - she's hitting on him.

THING
Huh. Well, watching a ball game by your lonesome, in a big town like this ... that uh, could be kinda miserable.

LINDA
You know what they say.

She smiles, casually lays her hand on his forearm. Contact.

LINDA
(continuing)
Misery loves company.

The Thing looks away, suddenly bashful.

THING
They do indeed. They do indeed. Tell you what, Linda, I don't get out of the house all that much myself, but I was thinking if you ever ...

He looks back to her - but she's not sitting next to him now. She's standing. Her smile is gone. Her voice is different, too. Softness gone - all business.

LINDA
Okay you guys - pay up. I touched him. You all owe me ten bucks.

The Thing turns to see she's addressing a group of DRUNK GUYS sitting at a nearby booth. All of them watching.

GUYS
Oh! Damn, she did it! You win, baby, a bet's a bet ...

The Thing just looks at them - they all leap to their feet.

FIRST GUY
What? You gonna do something? You wanna start something, Thing?

SECOND GUY
You can't take us all! Come on ...

THIRD GUY
Do it! Do it! We wanna see what you got, "rocky!"

The Thing stands, knocking over his stool, ready to rip these guys apart. The bartender grabs his arm.

BARTENDER
Listen, my insurance don't cover anything like this. Just go! Get out. I, I can give you a case for the road, if you want ...

But The Thing's not listening. He's watching Linda, who's getting her ten bucks apiece from the guys.

BARTENDER
(continuing)
But you brought this on yourself, coming out in public. You gotta see that ...

The Thing thinks it over. Then, sadly, just leaves cash on the bar, puts on his hat and coat, and silently heads for the exit without looking back ...

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Under pulsating strobe lights and blaring techno music, Johnny downs a drink and heads to the dance floor. It's jam-packed with writhing young bodies. Johnny passes a group

of young good-looking clubbers. Every girl in the group immediately loses interest in her boyfriend.

One GIRL, with a dancer's body and fiery red hair, makes a connection. Johnny doesn't say a word - just holds out his hand. The girl hands off her drink to her not-to-happy BOYFRIEND - and joins Johnny on the dance floor.

ANGLE ON: The dance floor. Johnny and the girl start to move around and about one another, like fighters sizing up an opponent. Their dancing gets hotter, more sexual, closer ...

And all the while, the girl's boyfriend just watches, smoldering ...

Johnny goes for broke - he grabs the girl close, their bodies press together. He dips her fast and pulls her back up to him - their lips nearly touching.

Other dancers can't help but notice the heat, and begin clearing the dance floor. Johnny and the girl, grabbing tight to one another, begin to spin as one. As they go 'round, Johnny heats up - his hair and clothes leaving fire trails in their wake. The girl gasps. Johnny grins. The music builds to its climax - and they're done.

Hot, sweaty, breathless.

JOHNNY
What do you say we get out of here?

Johnny takes the girl off the dance floor, ignoring the stares of everyone around them, heading for the bar ...

When her boyfriend blocks the way. He looks pissed, but calm. And did we mention? He's big. Johnny tries walking around, but the boyfriend sidesteps - in Johnny's face.

BOYFRIEND
Hey man. I ask you something?

Johnny gives the girl a re-assuring smile, nods to the bar. She heads over. Johnny faces the boyfriend head-on.

JOHNNY
Shoot.

BOYFRIEND
What kind of man are you?

JOHNNY
The kind your girlfriend likes.

BOYFRIEND
Right. Human Torch. We fight, you win. You want my girl? You take her. But all I'm saying is, if it were me? And I had your power? Man, I'd be doing something with it.

We hold on Johnny's face as he he realizes this guy isn't a jerk - and he's not picking a fight. He's just a fan who's telling the truth. It hits Johnny hard.

BOYFRIEND
(continuing)
I don't know what, exactly, but ... tell you what I wouldn't be doing. Wasting my time in dumps like this, hitting on other guys' girls.

And that's it. The guy's said his piece - he steps aside. Johnny sees the girl waiting at the bar for him. But the mood is ruined. Johnny turns and walks out without a word, passing a flock of GROUPIES who surround him for autographs.

INT. GRAY SWAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The Gray Swan Restaurant, where patrons speak in polite murmurs - the better to hear the string quartet. Reed and Sue sit together at a table by the window, over soft candle light, reading the menu.

SUE
How do you like this menu? It's in three different languages.

REED
I've read quadratic formulas less complicated.

Across the room, a hand taps the waiter's shoulder and points to their table. The hand belongs to Reed - who's thirty feet away. The waiter comes over, a little freaked out.

WAITER
Something to start?

SUE
Ooh, I feel like eating dessert first. How about you?

REED
Salad.

SUE
(sighing)
Two.

The waiter scoots away.

SUE
(continuing)
It's a date, Doctor Richards. You're allowed to lighten up.

REED
I am lightened up. This is me, all ... you know ... "light."

He tries a smile. He's awkward. Sue stifles a laugh.

SUE
Happy to hear it. It's good to get out of the Building for once, relax, have a little bit too much wine, maybe, and just ... talk.

REED
Right. So.
(beat)
What do we talk about?

SUE
I'll start. "How are you?"

REED
I'm ... working.

SUE
How's work?

REED
I can't talk about it.

Sue's patience snaps.

SUE
Why are we here?

REED
It's a date.

SUE
Uh-huh. Look. I like you, Reed. I don't know why, maybe I just have this thing for handsome, incurable geeks. But, if you can't open up to me, just a little bit ... that's when bad dates become no dates.

REED
You'd quit the team?

Oh, Reed. Wrong question.

REED
(continuing)
This isn't about the team, is it?

SUE
Separate things. I don't even know what my role in the Fantastic Four is. I have all this power, and I'm stuck playing Den Mom. On top of that, there's you and me. And "you and me" needs work.

REED
Okay. I can work. 'Cause work is, you know ... I do that.

SUE
Different definition, professor. Just be here. Talk to me. C'mon, Reed, why's everything got to be so ... locked up inside? I never know what you're feeling unless I guess.

REED
But you guess right a very high percentage of the time ...

SUE
... And half the rooms in the Baxter Building are locked.

Boom. This is what she's been building to. Reed has no answer. Susan softens, but presses at the same time:

SUE
(continuing)
Labeled "classified." Only you have the key. So what do you do in there?

The waiter interrupts, arriving with their salads.

WAITER
Ground pepper?

SUE
I got it.

Without looking, Sue freezes the waiter's pepper mill in mid-air with a force field - and grinds. She gets excited, talking to Reed. The waiter, still freaked, scoots.

SUE
(continuing)
Reed. I trust you. At least, I want to. And if you want to be the control freak, go ahead. But for my sake? Please, stop *thinking* everything out so hard and for one minute ... just feel.

REED
Feel what?

SUE
Power.

As she talks, Sue continues grinding pepper, pouring water, sharpening her knife against her fork and folding and unfolding her napkin - all with force fields. The air around her fills with floating dinner ware. Customers stare.

SUE
(continuing)
'Cause the power we have? You didn't invent it, we didn't ask for it, but baby it's ours, ready or not. And you keep trying to control us, but I'm thinking that's not the answer. I'm thinking we do more. I'm thinking we have fun. Use what we have, you know? Sometimes, don't you want to take all we got and just ... go nuts?

REED
No!

And suddenly - concentration broken - all the stuff floating around Sue comes crashing down to the table. Everyone in the place stares at them. Reed stretches out to tables around them with his fifteen-foot reach, picks up napkins. Pulls them back and starts mopping up their table.

REED
(continuing)
We don't even know what we are yet. Our powers are radioactive in origin - every time we use them we could be hurting ourselves, or worse, hurting others. We have to control them.

SUE
You mean *you* have to control them.

REED
That decision comes with the job.

SUE
If that's the way you figure it, Reed, then ...
(beat)
Maybe it should be my job.

Reed stares at her, stunned. Sue holds his gaze, thinking she might be getting through - when Reed snaps out of his reverie, clicks a pen and starts writing on the tablecloth.

REED
Just got an idea.

Sue leans over to see what it is. Like a student protecting his exam paper, Reed pulls the napkin close as he writes. A pack of PAPARAZZI arrive outside their quiet restaurant window - and start flashing photos. Sue covers her eyes in weary frustration - and turns invisible.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Click! A single light gets turned on in the enormous Baxter Building main room, silhouetting the massive stone figure of The Thing. He stands alone, holding an old, battered videocassette. It looks like it's been played many times. The Thing carefully places the tape into a high-tech VCR and, gently, with his oversized finger, presses "play."

The Thing's face gets bathed in the warm electric glow of a TV screen. He smiles sadly. We see what he sees: Static, replaced by a closeup of a pretty young woman's face. This is CATHY. Having fun in Central Park on a beautiful day.

Cathy grabs the camera, making the images jumble - then turns it around, so we are now looking at human Ben Grimm. Wearing short sleeves and khakis. Just a regular guy.

The Thing's eyes go misty as he sees his former self.

CATHY (O.S.)
We're talking to world-famous ace pilot Benjamin J. Grimm, on the eve of his historic flight into space. Mr. Grimm - what are your goals?

BEN
Short term: I'm getting me a hot dog.

He stops at a hot dog cart. Orders one.

BEN
(continuing)
Long term? I aim to kiss my beautiful gal goodbye, fly up to space, tool around, come home famous, then ... I dunno, get married, have a bunch of kids, maybe.

He bites into the hot dog.

BEN
(continuing; mouth full)
Aw shit, did I just say all that out loud?

Cathy laughs and the images now cut away to random moments, badly cut together, edited "in camera" like old home movies:

Ben trying to fly a kite. The kite stuck in a tree. Cathy throwing a frisbee. Ben catching it. The two of them lying on the Great Lawn's grass, Ben sleeping. A kiss.

Then it's over. Rudely replaced by loud, hissing static.

The Thing off clicks the TV. Sits in silence. Then looks over at the phone on the end table beside him. He picks up the phone. Tries to dial, but his big rocky digits press three buttons at a time. Tries again, more delicately.

Success. The phone rings. Then we hear:

CATHY (O.S.)
Hello?

There's also some party noises in the background. Nothing major, just a few folks laughing and chatting. Music ...

CATHY (O.S.)
(continuing)
Hello? Hel-lo ... ?

And The Thing suddenly hangs up the phone - not hard, for him, but still with enough force to crush the entire phone unit as well as the end table beneath it.

Pause. The Thing covers his eyes. He's so alone.

JOHNNY (O.S.)
... so I said to him, Mr. President, you can't be surprised we stopped all the meteorites ...

INT. "TODAY SHOW" SET - DAY

Johnny sits slouched next to Katie Couric on the set of "Today." He's rolling, mid-monologue.

JOHNNY
... I mean, it's not like anyone calls us the Realistic Four.

KATIE COURIC
Johnny, what about the danger? Do Fantastic Four activities ever imperil innocent bystanders?

JOHNNY
Well Katie, I don't think of them as "bystanders" so much as fans with disposable income. They love us, we love us, and as long as there's some freaky stuff that needs taking care of in New York City... the Fantastic Four's in business.

KATIE COURIC
Let's take a look at some of those fans.

EXT. "TODAY SHOW" WINDOW - DAY

The standard "Today Show Window" shot of fans packed outside Rockefeller Plaza. All of them TEENAGE GIRLS, screaming their heads off, holding up signs like "J. STORM'S HOT" and "I LUV U JOHNNY."

What none of them notice is the fire truck that races past behind them. Then another. And another ...

INT. "TODAY SHOW" SET - DAY

Back on set. Johnny sits upright, alert.

KATIE COURIC
I guess when you're hot, you're hot. Stick around, and we'll be back for cooking with Johnny Storm ... And something tells me we won't be using a conventional oven.

Katie turns to Johnny, smiling, but he ignores her. He speaks in the low, commanding tones of a leader.

JOHNNY
Mobilize your camera crew - meet me outside. And sorry about the couch.

KATIE COURIC
What about the ...

JOHNNY
Flame on!

Johnny instantly bursts into flame and flies off the set, whizzing past startled CAMERAMEN and CREW. His seat on the couch is left on fire. Katie reacts as crew members rush up with extinguishers, blasting it out.

EXT. ROCKEFELLER PLAZA - DAY

Johnny's gaggle of teenage fans all shriek and scatter away from the window - just as the flaming Human Torch comes flying through it, melting a hole in the glass before contact. He blasts right past them, causing their cardboard signs to smolder and smoke. They drop them.

ANGLE ON: The plaza itself, where CUSTOMERS run from their tables in a panic - in the center of the plaza, from out of nowhere, there erupts a huge, unnatural pillar of flame. Man-made, deliberate - its source a total mystery.

FIRE CREWS rush up to surround the raging pillar of fire, and try to contain it. Johnny shuts off his own flame, lands in smoking street clothes, and alights by a FIRE CHIEF.

JOHNNY
Chief - what's up?

FIRE CHIEF
Oh great. The Human Torch - just what we need - hotshot celebrities making things worse.

JOHNNY
Hello ... super hero. You might want to take advantage.

FIRE CHIEF
Hey - my guys are working here, we don't even know what the hell coulda caused this thing. You want to take advantage - go right ahead.

The Chief points to the "Today Show" CAMERA CREW that's running to the scene, hauling their mobile cameras ...

FIRE CHIEF
(continuing)
You might even make the six o'clock news. But we got a job to do, pretty-boy, so flame the hell off and stay out of our way.

The Chief runs off to join his crew, containing the inexplicable burst of flame as more panicked New Yorkers flee the scene. The camera crew and fans surround Johnny, waiting for his response. Johnny just stands there a minute, impotent, humiliated, anger growing ...

JOHNNY
(quiet, intense)
Flame on.

Johnny bursts into flame and flies straight up, leaving the fans and camera crews gasping, craning their necks to see:

Johnny flies up and over the pillar of flame that seems to be erupting straight up out of the ground, like a geyser. He sees it's spreading out from its epicenter, engulfing more tables and chairs as it grows.

Johnny thinks a moment, hovering, thinking hard ...

Then suddenly he swoops down to the base of the fire and flies circles around it. Faster and faster. Low to the ground at first, then higher. His jet stream creates a funnel of air, containing the pillar into a single column of fire. Then, having reached the top, Johnny dives straight down into the column of fire ...

FIRE CHIEF
What the hell's he doing?

ANGLE ON: Inside the center of the fire, Johnny stops, hovering in the middle of the flames, bows his head and folds his arms, like he's performing some Zen exercise.

And the calmer he gets, the hotter he glows. From red to yellow to burning white - Johnny heats up, hotter and hotter until he screams in agony - and explodes shock waves of pure heat off his body.

The fire crews, news crews and public all back off with a scream - as the pillar of flame flares out - then implodes. Johnny's explosion sucked all the oxygen from it.

All that's left is Johnny, exhausted, flameless, hovering fifteen feet above the ground. He plummets straight down. Crashes through a cafe table and some folding chairs, landing hard on the cement ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Johnny comes bursting triumphantly into Fantastic Four headquarters, his arm in a sling.

JOHNNY
Who's the man? The man of flame?
The photogenic, telegenic,
demographic bull's-eye of a ...

Johnny stops short. Shuts up. Senses something wrong. Hears a sound from down the hall. And gets real quiet real fast. He shuts off the lights - and hits a computer panel.

JOHNNY
(continuing)
Comp. Scan for intruders.

COMPUTER
Scanning - negative.

JOHNNY
Yuh-huh ...

Johnny proceeds down a darkened corridor, feeling his way along the wall. He stops when he sees a laboratory door's complex locking mechanisms turning ... by itself.

Concentrating, Johnny sends a single, finger-thick jet of flame down the hallway. He hears a sound.

SUE (V.O.)
Yipe!

Sue appears in the middle of the hallway, dodging the flame jet. She turns on Johnny, annoyed, and harshly whispers:

SUE
Cut it out!

JOHNNY
Sis, what are you doing?

SUE
Picking the lock to Reed's secret laboratory - with my mind.

JOHNNY
Can you do that?

SUE
Can you be quiet?

JOHNNY
I'm a mouse.

Brother and sister stand quietly side-by-side as Sue resumes concentrating. She makes the lock's mechanism slide back and forth on itself ... when - Crash! - Sue and Johnny jump. They turn to see The Thing right behind them, having just dropped a tin of pretzels.

JOHNNY/SUE
Shh!

THING
Whatcha guys doing?
(getting it)
Ooh. Lemme help? I'm stealthy.

Sue nods. The Thing smiles. Sue continues to concentrate as shimmering invisible threads manipulate the lock - until all the tumblers "click!" ... And the door automatically opens.

And we see their three faces as they get bathed in glowing, growing source of incredible light from the opening door ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

Reed studies alone. In silence. When suddenly he gets ripped from his chair and finds himself held in mid-air by The Thing. Sue and Johnny stand grimly flanking him.

SUE
Reed. Is there something you'd like to tell us?

And off Reed's face we cut to:

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - CORRIDOR - DAY

Reed leads the team down a gleaming white hallway that leads to the now unlocked door.

REED
I know you all think I've been overly secretive since the accident, but for the last eighteen months, I've been experimenting on a project involving the isolation of replicate isotopes at the sub-molecular level. Now the particle waves that changed our DNA was a one-in-a-billion confluence found only in nature. But I've made some advances, and, well, there's a name for what I've come up with, but since it takes about a minute and a half to pronounce, I just call it ...

He strides in through the open doors, into the glow. We follow him into the room, to find ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

... a high-tech laboratory, filled with Kirby-esque machines. And the centerpiece of them all is a metal device the size and shape of an average doorframe. (The same device the Pizza Guy photographed). From within its metallic frame, an inferno of unnatural light rages. Contained, for now.

REED
... The Wave.

Reed, familiar with the room, heads to a console.

REED
It's the raw power that we encountered out there in space. Re-created here at home.

Long pause. No one speaks, until:

SUE
The force that created us ...

REED
... Is, in its raw state, incredibly powerful. And in the wrong hands ...

JOHNNY
It'd make nuclear weapons look cute.

REED
But it's in my hands. Now step back from the frame. And watch:

Reed throws a series of switches. And within the metal frame - Fwoom! - A liquid-light display bursts dazzlingly to life. Contained within the frame, a glowing, swirling mass of energy writhes and undulates, looking dangerous and difficult to control, almost like a living animal.

REED
The energy it takes to turn man into monster. Or vice versa.

THING
Eighteen months and you never tell nobody ...

REED
Ben, I know what you're thinking. But we need tests, trials, research. The machine's not ready.

THING
I am.

Long pause as the three of them face Reed, all their faces bathed in the unnatural glow of the undulating Particle Wave.

REED
All right, then.

That snaps them out of it and we TIME CUT TO:

The Thing gets strapped into a metallic apparatus molded to the shape of his oversized body. Sue attaches shackle-like electrodes around The Thing's ankles and wrists with force-fields. The Thing hangs suspended above the Wave's frame. Reed attaches the last wires to the apparatus. All hooked up.

REED
Benjamin, before we begin - is there anything you'd like to say?

THING
Yeah - tell all the girls in New York to look out - 'cause I'm coming to break all their hearts.

Johnny smiles behind the digital camcorder he's holding up, recording the historic event.

REED
Sue. Containment field. Full force.

Sue concentrates and instantly The Thing and the apparatus he's attached to are surrounded by a spherical force-field.

Reed manipulates the controls on his console as, within the force-sphere, the field of energy crackles and pours across the wires, directly into The Thing's shackled body.

Reed pushes the controls to higher settings.

The Thing screams. The force-field clouds over instantly, filling with a dense fog-like residue - we can't see inside.

SUE
Reed, you're killing him.

REED
(snaps)
Concentrate! Let that field down and you'll kill us all!

Sue re-doubles her concentration, clearly not happy about it as Reed pushes all his controls to their limits. The screaming continues, building ... then suddenly stops.

All Reed's instruments flatline. Dead. Long, silent pause.

REED
Deactivate shield.

Sue relaxes and the sphere evaporates - filling the room with a gaseous cloud that swirls about.

Nobody moves. Johnny, camera in hand, is the first to step forward, toward a figure in the mist. Johnny, still filming, drops the camera to his side when out steps ...

BEN. Not The Thing, but human, stunned, smiling Ben. Still no one can speak. Ben takes a step forward and trips - his feet caught on the Thing-sized shorts down around his ankles.

BEN
Oops.

He pulls the shorts up to his waist, wraps them around. Still too stunned to speak. He pads, barefoot, across the room as if in a daze. Walks right past the other three. Johnny smiles as he passes. Sue kisses Reed.

ANGLE ON: Ben. Standing alone before a mirror. Just staring at first. Then, slowly, practicing different expressions, probing his face with his fingers - settling on a smile.

JOHNNY
Damn, Reed - you said this thing would work but, he's still ugly!

REED
Benjamin. Welcome home.

Ben looks to his three friends, unable to express his feelings - or his gratitude. He looks to Reed.

BEN
I've never been great with words. So I don't know how I'll ever be able to ... ever ... Nnngh!

Ben suddenly contorts, bent over sideways, grimacing in unspeakable pain, barely able to stand. The others rush to his side, try holding him up ...

REED
Ben, what is it?

BEN
Pain ...

Ben drops to the floor. Reed, Johnny and Sue can't hold him up. He sinks to a fetal position. The floor tiles beneath him begin to crack ...

Ben's grunts grow into a sustained, painful scream. His anguished face starts to change color and expand. We hear the horrible sound of flesh stretching, solidifying ... turning to rock.

BEN
No ... Reed, God, make it stop. Make it ... nnngggh ... stop ...

Reed watches helplessly as, with a sickening sound, Ben's flesh rips apart and orange rock erupts out. On his back, his arms, his face and skull ..

Ben transforms back into The Thing

The Thing lies there, curled up, groaning, rocking back and forth. Still. The other three approach him, cautiously ...

REED
Ben ...

The Thing lashes out with all his strength - backhanding Reed with the force of a car crash. The Thing roars, enraged.

THING
DON'T YOU TOUCH ME!

Reed gets propelled across the room and smashes into his console, shattering instruments and setting off sparks. The Thing goes on a full-out berserker rampage. Smashing lab equipment, throwing million-dollar technology aside ... Johnny rushes up to him.

Roaring, The Thing grabs Johnny's arm in the sling.

JOHNNY
Aahh!

The Thing hurls Johnny away as easily as if he were tossing out garbage. Johnny hurtles towards a bank of monitors, but:

JOHNNY
Flame on!

Johnny bursts into flame and reverses his trajectory in one move. He flies back to The Thing, hurtling fire balls. The Thing, a crazed, wounded animal, bats the fire aside, approaching Johnny. Reed grabs The Thing from behind, but The Thing's an unstoppable force. Moving forward ...

Until suddenly The Thing stops - gasps for air - trying to breathe in - but can't. He tries again - still can't. Gulping for air like a goldfish out of water, The Thing slowly sinks to his knees, gasping for oxygen.

Sue appears in front of the gasping Thing, her force-field bubble shimmering around his head, cutting off air. She speaks gently as she approaches him, unafraid.

SUE
Ben. Don't do this.

THING
(within bubble)
That's it, Suzie. Keep going. Cut the air off. Kill me.

SUE
No!

Sue removes the bubble and The Thing falls to his hands and knees, breathing, sobbing ...

SUE
Benjamin, don't you see? We love you and we would never hurt you.
(beat)
Oh, I know, baby, I know ...

She cradles his head in her arms. Johnny de-flames, lands. Reed retracts his arms. They both look on, unable to help.

SUE
You've been so brave. I know. So brave. Please, please don't hurt yourself, Ben.

THING
Don't ...

Sue stops. The Thing raises his tear-filled eyes to her.

THING
Don't call me "Ben," Suzie.

He stands, mustering all the dignity he can.

THING
Ben is dead. I'm just a thing.

He walks out, without another word, amid all the wreckage. Sue, joined by the silent Reed and Johnny, watches him go.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed sits over a steaming cup of coffee, looking like shit. Sue approaches him.

SUE
Reed. I don't understand all the science, but I do know this: You will cure Ben.

REED
Got a time and date to go with that?

SUE
I believe in you - completely - the one thing blocking your way are these marathons of isolation you go on.

REED
In solitude lies strength.

SUE
Do you really believe that?

Reed doesn't answer. And before Sue can pursue this, the video screen pops to life, and Mr. Buscema appears.

MR. BUSCEMA
Richards! This is your landlord! You got company!

REED
Mr. Buscema, I'm really not in the mood right now.

MR. BUSCEMA
Like that matters. This is the government calling, smart guy, tell them about your moods. I'm sure they'll be real understanding.

Mr. Buscema's image scrambles, and is replaced with the vid image of two suit-and-tie government agents - AGENT THOMAS and AGENT PEREZ.

AGENT THOMAS
Reed Richards?

They hold up their FBI badges to the screen.

AGENT PEREZ
We'd like to ask you a few questions.

TIME CUT TO:

Reed and Sue sitting on the couch, looking intimidated, as Agents Thomas and Perez stand in front of them. Thomas asks the questions, Perez checks out the surroundings.

AGENT THOMAS
Man. Wait'll I tell my kids I was inside the world famous Baxter Building. They're gonna flip.

SUE
If you want to search the premises, you'll need probable cause.

REED
And a warrant.

AGENT PEREZ
Dr. Richards, you commanded a space shuttle mission about a year and a half ago, did you not?

REED
That's a matter of public record.

AGENT THOMAS
We're not the public. Now on that shuttle, which you designed, there were certain ... technologies.

AGENT PEREZ
Secret technologies.

AGENT THOMAS
Which you invented.

REED
Could you not touch that, please?

He's talking to Agent Perez, who's picked up and is handling a small Kirby-esque gadget.

AGENT PEREZ
Is it dangerous?

SUE
(shrugs)
Not if you don't want children.

Agent Perez carefully puts the thing down, a little spooked

AGENT THOMAS
My partner and I, we're not geniuses or super-heroes, so I'll talk plain. You've got a lot of stuff up here the government thinks is dangerous. Of course we can't prove that without a warrant.

AGENT PEREZ
Which we can get.

AGENT THOMAS
But that could generate bad publicity. You know all about publicity, don't you Dr. Richards?

REED
I don't seek it out.

AGENT THOMAS
Johnny Storm does. "The Human Torch?" He put out a fire in Rockefeller Plaza. Bad for New York. But good for the super hero business. Now the department had no idea what started this fire.

AGENT PEREZ
So they called us.

AGENT THOMAS
And we found this.

He reaches into his suit pocket, pulls out a sterile plastic evidence baggie. Slides it over the table to Reed. Reed holds it up. We see it is a charred piece of one of Victor' mechanical Bugs. Reed inspects it.

AGENT THOMAS
Recognize it?

REED
No.

AGENT THOMAS
Neither did we, 'til we ran the full-on cross reference from Langley. Didn't match any arsonist, terrorist or nut jobs we know about ...

AGENT PEREZ
And then we checked you.

AGENT THOMAS
And guess what? Perfect match.

Sue and Reed just look at one another. Reed re-inspects the charred metal in the baggie.

AGENT THOMAS
There's certain signatures ... metallurgies, patent designs ... like I say, I'm no genius. But everything in this little hunk of metal points to the unique technology on your space shuttle.

AGENT PEREZ
Which points to you.

REED
Are you saying I started the fire?

AGENT THOMAS
We're saying we're curious.

Angry, Reed holds the metal thing up for the agents to see.

REED
Look, I don't know where you got this, or where it came from, but I guarantee this level of technology has never been outside these walls.

We cut directly to:

EXT. SOHO STREET - NIGHT

Another high-tech mechanical Bug. Hovering. As if watching the street below. We see what the Bug sees:

It sees a garbage can tumble into view. The Thing is walking down a lonely street in a bad neighborhood by himself, lazily kicking a garbage can like you'd kick a soda can.

Lost in thought, The Thing passes by a boarded-up construction site. A half-finished building stands towering above the street, lit by sporadic security lighting.

The Thing looks up to see: Two PAPARAZZI coming his way. They spot him, talk fast, loading their cameras ...

THING
Guy can't buy a break in this town.

He rips an opening in the boards and rams through, gone.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

The Thing stomps through the eerily-lit construction site alone, past cranes, bulldozers and cement mixers, all silhouetted like dinosaur skeletons in the night.

THING
Rats with cameras ...

As The Thing grumbles his way across the site, we see the Bu dart through the air, behind him, staying out of sight. A digital blue glow emits from one of its panels.

P.O.V. shot - The Thing, as seen by the Bug. Every conceivable piece of data get automatically tallied on a computer readout alongside his video image: Bio-thermal feedback. Temperature. Height, weight, range of motion, etc. The Thing is being studied ....

The Bug flits past The Thing, shooting overhead. He almost notices, shrugs it off, keeps walking. The Bug alights at the controls of one of the site's giant machines. Different panels light up, and hum - activating something ...

Choom! Choom! Choom! The Thing suddenly freezes as all around him, every headlight on every machine in the yard turns on. The Thing looks around.

THING
Huh.

And a three-ton wrecking ball, released from its moorings, fills frame - and before The Thing can move ... Boom! He gets fully, bodily smashed with the wrecking ball. Goes rocketing across the yard.

The Thing blasts straight into the side of a cement truck, punching a giant hole in its side. Wet cement pours out, until - Plop! - The Thing, covered in wet cement, hits the

ground along with the outpouring of goo. He staggers to his feet, shaking off the cement when ...Wham! - the wrecking ball hits him again, this time from behind.

The Thing goes flying forward, arms and legs splayed. He lands hard in front of a bulldozer. Which comes to life as he stands, chugging forward. The Thing grabs hold of the bulldozer's metallic front scoop, pushes hard against it.

His big rocky feet dig into the dirt below, but the ground gives way beneath him and The Thing gets shoved back ...

Back into the path of the wrecking ball, which this time hits him square, sending him into the bulldozer's metallic scoop.

That hurt. The Thing is barely conscious. He struggles to move inside the scoop, which now lifts him up as it carries him across the yard. He nearly pulls himself out when he is dumped out ...

Onto the conveyor belt of a giant, pounding rock-crusher. The Thing gets rolled to the end of the belt - where a punishing, three-ton steel hammer comes crashing down, rhythmically, crushing rocks to powder.

The Thing, groggy, tries getting off the belt but cannot. Half-alive, he's taken to the end of the conveyor belt. The three-ton metal hammer comes plunging down upon him ...

And drawing on some inner reserve of strength, The Thing, lying flat on his back, manages to reach up with both massive hands - and grab the hammer, stopping it in its tracks.

The hammer presses down. The Thing grunts and struggles with it, its full weight bearing down on him, hydraulics whining with the strain. The Thing presses up with strength and might equal to that of the multi-ton hammer. They struggle back and forth, until finally, with a resolve dug up from deep within, The Thing shoves the rock-crusher up and off him, crushing the hammer to pieces. Contest won.

The Thing jumps to the ground. Looks up - holding his arms out - and waits for the wrecking ball to take another swing at him. It does - but this time The Thing is ready. Timing it, he waits for the giant metal ball to come at him - and when it does, he nimbly side-steps the wrecking ball.

It passes him. The Thing runs, jumps, and lands upon the wrecking ball as it swings upward. He grabs hold of the massive chain connecting the ball to its crane - and yanks. The chain snaps. The ball, with The Thing still atop it, comes crashing into the dirt, furrowing into the ground.

The Thing, still holding the chain, waits for the crane, the bulldozer and the cement mixer to come at him. They do, rumbling across the yard, bearing down ...

THING
Come on, ya big tinker toys ...

The trucks all rush him at the same time, all from the same direction, lining up ...

THING
I got a present for ya.

The Thing lifts the chain over his head and starts swinging the wrecking ball, around his head, building up centrifugal force ...

Then, he lets go - the wrecking ball goes sailing at the trucks, its chain whipping behind. Direct hit! With a thundering crash, the ball smashes the trucks backward, into the base of the nearly-constructed building.

The Thing watches as the entire construction comes collapsing to the ground, sending out massive plumes of dust.

A helicopter appears overhead, shining its blinding arc light down on the ground, its spotlight searching ...

The Thing makes a run for it. With massive bounds, he pounds his way across the site, to the other side. Another copter appears overhead, its searchlight probing the ground below.

The Thing punches his way through the boards and makes it to the street as the sounds of police sirens grow.

EXT. YANCY STREET - NIGHT

The Thing, coated in dirt, blood and cement, breathing heavily and barely able to walk, staggers down the street .. and walks right into a STREET GANG.

THING
What a revoltin' development this is.

GANG LEADER
Who wants to be famous? Go down as the gang what killed The Thing? Get blood from a stone ...

They draw their guns and step toward the pained, panting Thing. Cock their firearms and aim. The gang leader smiles

his gold tooth glistening in the street light when all of a sudden - Whap! - from out of nowhere, he gets smacked in the face with a white cane.

GANG LEADER
Ow!

ALICIA
Leave him alone!

The gang turns to see ALICIA MASTERS, alone. Alicia's in her late twenties, wears a battered army jacket, mini skirt and boots. She's cute. She's blind. She's about to be killed.

GANG LEADER
Check it out. Helen Keller wants a piece. Whatcha gonna do, blind girl? Can't even see me, how you gonna ...

Whap! The Gang Leader gets smacked in the face again.

GANG LEADER
Oh, what, you got heightened senses, 'cause you're blind?

He circles Alicia like a predator. The Thing, genuinely stunned, just raises a rocky eyebrow and watches.

ALICIA
No. I have regular senses.
(grins)
You just smell bad.

That does it. The Leader and his Girl grab their guns and shove them right in Alicia's face - when they both suddenly disappear from frame ...

As The Thing yanks them both clear across the street, their bodies go flying and landing painfully in some piled-up New York City garbage. The Thing turns on the rest of the gang. They open fire. Bullets ricochet noisily off The Thing's chest as he shoves Alicia behind him for protection. Despite the danger, they talk casually:

THING
Well this ain't boring. Got a name?

ALICIA
Alicia.

THING
Ben.

ALICIA
Pleasure.

THING
Likewise.

The police cars come screeching to a halt behind them. The gang members, realizing this is going nowhere, all scatter different directions. COPS follow.

ALICIA
Come on.

Alicia grabs The Thing by the wrist and pulls him along wit her, quickly. They slip into an alley.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Alicia leads The Thing quickly down an alley as the sounds sirens and overhead copters fill the street behind them.

THING
Not that I'm against minding my own business, but what's a girl like you doing 'round here?

ALICIA
A girl like me lives around here. Pothole.

The Thing sidesteps a pothole Alicia knew was there.

INT. ALICIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Five different locks get noisily unlocked and a door opens. Alicia leads The Thing into her apartment. It's dark.

THING
Uh, where's the light switch?

ALICIA
What are you asking me for? I never use it. Kidding. On your left.

The Thing clicks on the lights. Steps in and looks around. Alicia's apartment is a large, downtown loft studio. Fille with nude sculptures and artist's supplies. But mostly nud sculptures. The Thing is a bit flummoxed.

ALICIA
(from kitchen)
Want a beer?

THING
(distracted)
Yuh-huh. So, uh, you collect all this stuff, or ... ?

Alicia re-enters with two cans of beer.

ALICIA
Collect 'em? Hell no, I make 'em. Then sell 'em. You believe that? It's quite the scam - don't let it get around.

She hands him a beer. Cracks hers open.

ALICIA
Cheers.

THING
Thanks.

ALICIA
You're The Thing, right?

THING
What they call me.

ALICIA
Rough night?

THING
I'd call it unusual. Punks wantin' to get a piece of the rock ... that's just pretty normal. But gettin' sandbagged by a bunch of remote controlled machines ...

ALICIA
Weird.

THING
I'll say. Uh, Alicia, now don't think I ain't housebroken, but um ...

We see The Thing is dripping wet cement onto the floor.

THING
I seem to be dripping.

ALICIA
Cement?

THING
It's not me.

ALICIA
Say no more.

The Thing watches as Alicia goes to the kitchen sink, screws a hose into the tap, and comes back holding the hose in one hand and a trowel in the other.

ALICIA
Stand up. Take off your coat.

THING
Wh-what are you doing?

ALICIA
Tell me if this is too cold.

She sprays him with water from the hose, then starts scraping the cement off his chest.

THING
Yaah!

ALICIA
What?

THING
Tickles.

ALICIA
Don't be a baby. Geez.

She gets to work on him, acting cleanly and professionally, her hands just seem to know where to go. The Thing stands still, watching her. Nobody's touched him like this. Not since he became The Thing. Alicia sponges his chest.

THING
Alicia, you, um ... you're not a ... doing this on a bet or something, are you?

Alicia gives The Thing a frown that stops him cold.

ALICIA
I can be a little forward. If you have a problem with that, there's the door. If not, turn around.

The Thing turns around. Alicia sponges his back. Then picks up a clean rag and starts to dry The Thing's rocky body off. Her strokes get slower, more sensual as she goes.

ALICIA
Listen, Ben. As long as I'm being my usual pushy self ... you want to go out on a date? With me?

The Thing says nothing. Alicia frowns.

ALICIA
I'm not great with facial expressions, so answer anytime.

THING
Unless we get invaded from outer space - I'm there.

ALICIA
What if we do get invaded from outer space?

THING
I'll be twenty minutes late.

ALICIA
Can you be hurt, Ben?

As she asks this, she pulls off a small chip of rock from his chest - a fragment where the bullets hit.

THING
Not on the outside. Keep it. Fantastic Four souvenir.

ALICIA
Gee, thanks. Wonder what it'll go for on e-bay.
(beat)
Kidding. Again. Don't worry, you'll get used to me.

She takes the rock chip, finds a ziplock baggie on her table of art supplies and gingerly, almost lovingly, seals it.

ALICIA
(continuing)
Now, it's time for this lady to throw you out, Mr. Ben Grimm. While I still have my honor intact.

THING
Right. So what do you want to do? Saturday, I mean. You like Mets games? Or the opera. Nah, I hate opera. There's movies ...

ALICIA
We'll think of something.

THING
So ... why are you doing this?

ALICIA
Benjamin. I'm a sculptress. I work with my hands. And you feel amazing.

The Thing just stands there, speechless, having been walked to the door. Alicia smiles sexily and closes the door.

ALICIA
Good ni-ight ...

EXT. THIRTY-FOURTH STREET - DAY

We see a Daily News headline: "Thing Amok!" accompanied by a overhead photo of The Thing hurling the wrecking ball at the building. Beneath the photo: "School destroyed."

REED (O.S.)
School destroyed. Great.

ANGLE ON: Reed and Sue, walking down Broadway and 34th. Ree reacting to today's headlines, Sue holding his arm.

REED (O.S.)
Ben tore down a nearly-constructed public school. That ought to help our image.
(scanning paper)
I sure hope there were nuns or puppies inside ...

SUE
Would you stop torturing yourself with that?

REED
He could have at least told us.

SUE
He got in late. I'm sure there's an explanation. It's not like Ben to just go ripping apart whole buildings for no reason.

REED
He has a reason. I ruined his life.

Reed stops, turns around, goes back. Sue stops him.

REED
I have to go back to work.

SUE
Reed! Come on, we agreed we'd try to balance our lives a little. Some Fantastic Four time, some time for you and me ... remember?

REED
But it's an emergency!

SUE
Life in the F.F. will be one endless emergency, I promise.

She leads him towards Macy's.

SUE
You're not going to cure Ben locking yourself away from the world. Sir Isaac Newton discovered gravity sleeping under an apple tree. So, imagine the breakthroughs you could have buying me a pashmina scarf.

Sue whisks Reed through Macy's revolving doors. There's a beat, then we see one of Victor's flying mechanical bugs flit into frame, then zip unnoticed through the revolving doors after them ...

INT. MACY'S - DAY

Sue leads Reed inside, past perfumes, shoes, heading towards the men's section. Other customers passing them by don't ask for autographs this time - they just give them dirty looks.

REED
It's not just Ben I'm worried about. Johnny's growing out of my control.

SUE
He's young. It's natural. The way I hear it, you were quite a pain in the butt yourself, at his age.

REED
I was never his age.

They pass the perfume spritzer SALESGIRL. She ignores them.

SUE
Right. Uh, Reed? Why is everyone here looking at us like ...

REED
Like we cost the city millions of dollars? New York's a great town - but fickle.

SUE
Oh, that's so unfair! Honey, your inventions have more than paid off any property damage the Fantastic Four has done.

REED
They don't know that. The fact we donate millions to schools and charities will never make headlines. But "The Thing Amok?" That's front page news. Can we go home so I can turn Ben human now?

SUE
No. Damn it, we're the Fantastic Four. We're the good guys.

Sue gets in the face of a passing lady CUSTOMER.

SUE
We break it, we bought it, on a very large scale, lady. You got that?

Lady customer nods like Sue's a crazy person and scoots.

SUE
We need spin control.

REED
Good luck. The public will never think law and order is sexy so long as there's ...

Boom! Reed is suddenly interrupted as a giant explosion rips through the store, blasting sporting goods and mannequin parts across the floor.

REED
... Chaos.

Pandemonium ensues. People rush for the exits, screaming, shoving their way past one another in a large scale violent panic. Reed grabs Sue - points..

Sue looks to see: a high-tech-looking metal sphere comes rolling into the center of the store.

SUE
Reed, what is it?

REED
Smart bomb. Remote-guided, compression-rigged payload ...

A hatch opens on the sphere's top - two slender mechanical arms reach in and pull out another little sphere. The big sphere rolls away, and the little sphere grows. A hatch opens on its top - and mechanical arms pull out another one. The process continues. Mommy bomb, baby bomb, over and over.

REED
... And they're self-replicating. Who could have built these things?

SUE
Besides you?

They exchange a look.

REED
I'll handle crowd control - you stop the bombs.

Without another word, they spring into action. Reed elongates his body and spreads out in front of a crowd of terrified shoppers who rush into a bomb's path.

Reed forms a one-man wall with his spreading torso.

CUSTOMER
Get out of our way!

SALESMAN
He's trying to get us all killed!

REED
Everyone, please - head for the exits as calmly as you ...

Boom! The bomb Reed shelters the crowd from explodes, makir his already spread-out torso balloon out - painfully. Reed screams in agony. The crowd rushes the exit.

ANGLE ON: The ceiling. Perched upside-down, clamped into th store ceiling, sits the mechanical bug. Watching.

We see the Bug's perspective on the battle below. Digital readouts of Reed Richards fill its many tiny screens. Reed is being studied. The Bug turns its monitors to Sue.

ANGLE ON: Sue, as the self-replicating bombs are rolling all over the store now. Up escalators, under counters, behind clothing displays ...

Sue's eyes dart at her escaping prey like an expert huntress She then draws her arms toward herself in one striking gesture of power. All the bombs, at the same time, come flying out of their respective hiding places. Fast. Each one coated in a contained, shimmering force-bubble. Sue collects all the bombs into one massive bubble in the center of the store. Reed lies on the ground, groaning, barely conscious. Panicked customers run past him, ignoring him, nearly trampling him. He raises an arm, trying to help them get away from the bomb cluster - but he can barely stretch.

The customers will not get out in time.

REED
Sue - the bombs - they're timed. Going to detonate ...

SUE
I'm counting on it.

The bombs, more than a half dozen now, lie clumped together in Sue's force field, still replicating, squirming inside he invisible bubble, surrounded by dozens of innocent people...

Sue just concentrates harder. Sweat beads form on her forehead. She grits her teeth. The force-bubble begins to

contract, shrinking, squeezing the mechanical bombs together, pressing them in tighter and tighter until ...

They explode inside the force bubble - but they do not break it. The bubble bulges out to twice its size, then contracts again. The bomb shards fall harmlessly to the ground - nothing now but smoking hunks of metal....

The crowd is safe. They look on, agape.

Sue's nose bleeds. She wobbles where she stands, then her knees go out from under her and she collapses, upending a shoe display stand and crashing to the ground, unconscious.

ANGLE ON: The Mechanical Bug's readout. Having recorded all of the Invisible Girl's vital information, the Bug's monitors efficiently shut themselves off.

Unnoticed by the crowd, the Bug detaches itself from the ceiling and flies out of the store, over the heads of the panicked customers and the SECURITY GUARDS who struggle to usher them out ...

The Bug nearly flies out the revolving exit - when all of a sudden, like a giant frog's tongue - Thwap! - A hand shoots out of nowhere and snatches it from its flight path.

Reed retracts his arm. He pulls the struggling Bug to him. Stretching is pure agony, but he manages to haul the Bug in, it squirms in his grip. He smashes it hard onto the floor.

The Bug stops struggling. Reed rolls over and sees Sue lying there, unconscious. He looks back to the Bug in his hand as the sound of sirens grows ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - EXPERIMENT ROOM - DAY

We see an extreme closeup of the view through a flourescent-lit, scientific magnifying glass. A sterile glass tray gets slid under the glass for viewing.

Inside the glass lies the shattered parts of the Bug.

Sue and Johnny stand behind Reed as he studies the Bug, lying on his work table like he's performing a mechanical autopsy. The Thing enters, wearing a suit, struggling with his tie.

REED
Someone's been studying us. Someone very smart, someone very dangerous.

THING
What is that thing, Reed?

JOHNNY
Looks like the kinda gizmo you'd geek out on.

REED
This "gizmo" as you call it has recorded everything there is to know about us. No - not everything. Just our weaknesses. Our limits.

He lifts it into view with a pair of tongs, studying it ...

REED
And I'm betting, how to kill us.

JOHNNY
So - we're fighting robots now?

REED
It's not a robot, Johnny. Now shut up and listen. You might learn something that keeps us from being dead.

Chastised, Johnny folds his arms and glares.

REED
It's a transmitter. Judging from the welding seals, I'd say one in a series. See this? That's a camera. Capable of recording complex medical data, then beaming it off a satellite.

SUE
Where to?

REED
Anywhere in the world. And that's not all. This section ...

He detaches the Bug's lower half, holds it up to the group.

REED
... looks designed to house its own specially built weaponry. This one was built to release smart bombs.
(more)

REED (cont'd)
Other models could easily be modified.
(to Ben)
To magnetically operate heavy machinery ...
(to Johnny)
Or set off some very large, mysterious, hard-to-contain fires.

This sinks in with the group - and they don't look happy.

REED
But this - this part's my favorite.

He unscrews a small hatch on the side, pours out what looks like a handful of bbs.

REED
Magnetically polarizing ion pellets.

THING
English, Professor.

REED
Anti-gravity technology. "Wings." Help the thing fly. So it can track us, test our powers, then fly away free. Unseen and undetected.

He drops it heavily back in its tray, making a loud clatter.

REED
Over the past two weeks every one of us has been tested beyond anything like our normal limits. We thought it was random. It wasn't. Someone's watching us. Whoever it is now knows more about the Fantastic Four than we do. And they could strike from anywhere on the planet.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - DAY

We see a group of LIMOUSINES drive smoothly up Fifth Avenue, weaving through traffic without effort. From their antennae, there proudly flutters the Latverian national flag.

The limos pulls up to a tasteful Fifth Avenue townhouse. Standing outside, packing the sidewalk, there's a phalanx of NEWS REPORTERS, eagerly awaiting the limos' arrival with microphones, cameras and bright lights.

The cars stop. A CHAUFFEUR briskly steps from the head limo Like clockwork, he's joined by two members of the LATVERIAN GUARD and together, they approach the passenger door.

A FIGURE steps out of the back seat. We do not see his face but he is well dressed in a fine tailored suit, thick coat draped over his shoulders, flowing behind him like a cape.

Flashbulbs explode in a frenzy of PAPARAZZI swarming. Microphones get shoved forward as the reporters push and shove one another for better access.

The figure sweeps past the reporters, held back by ROYAL GUARDS. He strides to the top of the townhouse steps. We see it is The Latverian Embassy.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed faces the others, looking grave.

REED
It's Victor. He's alive. He's come back. And he's trying to kill us.

THING
You sure, Reed? I mean, we all saw that escape pod ...

REED
It's him.

Long beat as this sinks in.

SUE
If you're right ... we have to find him. Talk to him.

REED
No.

SUE
What, then?

REED
I don't know! Yet. I just ... I need time to think.

JOHNNY
Honestly, Reed? For a genius, you should have seen this coming. I
(more)

JOHNNY (cont'd)
mean, the guy's name is *Doom*. If it was Victor Von Cookie Dough - okay - room for surprise there.

REED
It's no joke, Johnny!

JOHNNY
Don't mean it can't be fun. Guys, this is it. We're under attack by someone who could actually do us some real damage for a change. I say, bring him on.

REED
Rush into a fight with no plan, no strategy - that's just what he wants.

SUE
How do you know what he wants?

Reed holds up the remains of the mechanical Bug.

REED
This gives me a pretty good idea.

JOHNNY
Ben! What do you say? You and me, buddy, Torch and the Thing, how about we go stomp Victor's guts out?

REED
We work as a team or not at all.

SUE
But Reed, you're the one who's isolated himself.

THING
Sorry, kid.

He plucks a flower from a planter, puts it in his lapel.

THING
I'm a lover not a fighter.

JOHNNY
What the hell is wrong with everybody? The bell has rung - let's fight!

As he says this, eerie, sharp shafts of light pierce through the blinds of the fortieth story window. Only The Thing notices. Blinking into the glare, he crosses to the window.

REED
He'd kill us, Johnny! All of us. We don't have enough data yet!

SUE
Well you won't get the answers locked away in here.

REED
You want to rush into a fight, like your brother?

SUE
If you weren't afraid of Victor, we could find him and talk to him.

REED
You think I'm afraid?

SUE
Reed, we have power - we could use that power if you weren't so ...

JOHNNY
Scared.

REED
Yes! I am scared! And you should be. Victor is dangerous. He can do anything - anything - because he works alone, and doesn't have you three holding him back!

Beat. Everyone freezes. That stings. Nobody moves or says a word. Until The Thing, standing by the window, looking out into the unnatural glare, speaks softly:

THING
Hey, everybody ...

The Thing pulls aside the blinds - outside the floor-to-ceiling window, a swarm of NEWS HELICOPTERS hover, shining glaring bright camera lights right into the building.

THING
(continuing)
We're on TV.

Sue blasts a small pebble of invisible force across the room, turning on the wall of TV monitors. The group is surrounded by the images of themselves, as seen from the news cameras.

TV ANNOUNCER
... live from the Baxter Building in Manhattan, where the "Fantastic Four," led by Dr. Reed Richards, continue to perform their experiments in unlicensed genetic enhancement. For more on the story we go now to the Latverian Embassy in midtown.

The Fantastic Four all slowly, as if in a trance, walk toward the wall of TV monitors. Watching, in awe, shocked ...

The image on the TV shows a group of jostling REPORTERS at a press conference, working for position, taking their seats. Victor, still in his mask, enters the room.

VICTOR
(on TV)
Good evening.

We cut from the TV image to the embassy itself:

INT. LATVERIAN EMBASSY - DAY

Victor, in his mask, sits at a small table, surrounded by microphones, the Latverian flag looming behind him.

VICTOR
My name is Victor Von Doom. Eighteen months ago, I joined a scientific expedition to the outer reaches of earth's orbit. Led by Dr. Reed Richards, our mission was one of peace, hope, and the betterment of mankind. Or so we were told.

We cut back and forth between Victor and the Fantastic Four, huddled around the TV, watching ...

VICTOR
What none of us knew at the time is that the phenomenon we were sent to investigate had been studied, in secret, by Dr. Richards. We were unaware it could have profound effect on our own DNA. That it had the
(more)

VICTOR (cont'd)
power to turn human beings into ... something else. It needed testing. And we were the guinea pigs.

Reed watches in cold, silent fury. The other three say nothing. But they exchange looks ...

The reporters all go nuts, asking questions a mile a minute.

REPORTERS
Victor! Victor! How can you prove these allegations? Is that mask some kind of life support? How'd you survive? Where've you spent the last year? Have you spoken with Richards?

VICTOR
Please. I must ask you not to shout. My hearing, like the rest of me, has become ... delicate.

REED
I'm turning this off.

THING
You do, and I rip you apart.

JOHNNY
Yeah Reed - let's hear it.

VICTOR
Richards planned to expose his crew to this phenomenon, this "confluence of particle waves," to see what would happen. When I refused to cooperate, I was jettisoned - like so much unwanted cargo. The remaining crew became modified. Gained their so-called "super powers." So Richards christened his team "The Fantastic Four." But don't be deceived. The Fantastic Four are nothing less than the world's first genetically enhanced army of super-soldiers. And Reed Richards - their commander in chief.

REPORTER
But aren't they heroes?

VICTOR
Only because they use you - the media - to call them that.

REPORTER
Can you tell us how Richards knew?

VICTOR
I can show you.

He holds up a digital data tape.

VICTOR
I'm not the only survivor of our journey into space. Here, in my hand, are ship's logs from the shuttle *Diana*. Untouched, unedited, and undeniable proof of what Reed Richards has done. I've come back to ask you - show this to the world.

We see the image on the TV fritz out static for a second - then it is replaced by the image of ...

Reed. On the space shuttle, Reed sits alone, studying a monitor, the other three work in the background, paying no attention to Reed as he works.

REED
Ship log, November seventeenth, looks like the effects of the wave on human DNA could be profound as predicted, and my calculations are correct. Direct exposure would mean a strong likelihood of creating ... homo superior. Downloading report to my personal files ... now.

We see the screen Reed is looking at. It shows images of a human body with computer-generated images of waves pouring through them. The image of the body transforms - grows.

In the Baxter Building, the silence is deafening.

SUE
He's lying. Those tapes were manipulated, or digitized, or ... Reed. Tell them it's fake.

Sue looks to Reed. He cannot meet her eye.

SUE
Reed ...

REED
I can't.

JOHNNY
You mean, it's true?

THING
You studied us?

SUE
Reed?

REED
Ben - Johnny - I ... I studied everything! You know me, I examine every possible paradigm! But I never meant ... I didn't plan to ...

JOHNNY
REED!

Johnny bursts into flames and flies up to Reed, hovering, right in his face, still flaming, and growls:

JOHNNY
Did you know?

Reed cannot answer. Victor's image returns to the TV.

VICTOR
I know this broadcast is reaching millions of people. But I wish to address only three. Johnny, Susan, Benjamin. If there is any doubt in your mind - ask yourself this: what happens when you try to leave the "Fantastic Four?" Does the good doctor not bind you to him?

We see Johnny.

VICTOR
With authority?

Susan.

VICTOR
With affections?

The Thing.

VICTOR
With promises of a better life, always scheduled to start tomorrow?
(beat)
You are his power. You possess a world of might, yet remain his victims. For the good of the world, I ask you: walk away. No legal or government authority can shut down the Baxter Building. It's up to you.

Reed's fist smashes into the biggest of the many TV monitors, spiderwebbing the glass screen and shutting out the noise. But all the other monitors keep playing Victor's message ...

VICTOR
We worry what would happen if his technology fell into the wrong hands. But I am telling you: it's in the wrong hands now.

Reed smashes screen after screen. But he can't get them all.

VICTOR
I've done all I can. And now, I am weak. I must retire. Good night, good luck, and God bless you all ...

Click! Sue gently turns off the last TV monitor. Silence.

Reed turns to the others. No one says a word. Reed takes a step toward The Thing, wanting to explain ...

The Thing grabs Reed and lifts him straight up off the floor.

THING
I spent over a year, lying awake at night and wondering why God would do this to me.
(beat)
Guess I been blaming the wrong guy.

Reed locks eyes with The Thing, searching for the trust between them. It's not there. The Thing drops him. Turns and leaves. Reed turns to Johnny and Sue.

REED
No. Don't you see, he's exploiting us. I studied everything, I didn't know! Johnny. Think. Why would I do this to my friends?

JOHNNY
Asking the wrong guy. "Doctor."

Johnny turns and leaves. Reed and Sue stand alone.

REED
Susan ...

SUE
You always wanted to work alone.

Sue hesitates, pained ... then leaves. Reed stands alone in the Baxter Building's main room. The silence is shattered by the sound of his landlord, coming in over the intercom:

MR. BUSCEMA
Richards! You are in very big trouble, Mister!

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LOBBY - EVENING

Mr. Buscema stands in the lobby, screaming into the monitor that shows the fractured image of Reed Richards. Buscema's yelling to be heard over the crowd of people pushing and shoving around him. REPORTERS, TOURISTS, FANS, and coming up behind him, FBI Agents Thomas and Perez.

MR. BUSCEMA
You and your superfriends are evicted! How ya like that? And the FBI would like a word with you!

Sue comes out the elevator, walks past Mr. Buscema. She is immediately surrounded by the reporters.

REPORTERS
Sue! Invisible Girl! How's it feel to be experimented on without your consent? Will you be seeking a lawsuit? Are you ...

She turns invisible.

SUE (V.O.)
No comment.

The Thing rips out one of the doors, stomping through the lobby crowd. Mr. Buscema latches on to him, following ...

MR. BUSCEMA
You! Thing! Tell Richards I want his equipment out of the building. I'm serving notice. You tell him ...

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - EVENING

The Thing pushes through the throng of people, never violent, but straight through - a force of nature.

THING
Tell him yourself, pal. Me?

He looks up to see Johnny blaze a flaming streak across the sky, away from the Baxter Building ...

THING
... I got a date.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

We pan across the cream of New York Society, dressed in tuxedoes and evening gowns. And in the middle of it all stands The Thing, looking nervous, tugging at his collar. A WAITER passes by with a tray of hors d'oevres.

WAITER
Canape?

The Thing takes the entire tray, slides all the hors d'oevres into his mouth, hands the tray back.

THING
And keep 'em coming.

The waiter leaves. The Thing grabs a handful of napkins and wipes his mouth. And sees, across the room, Alicia.

And tonight, she's a different girl. Gone are the leather jacket and boots - tonight Alicia's a knockout in elegant evening wear. She comes up to the speechless Thing, slips her arm into his.

ALICIA
Hello, handsome.

THING
Hi yourself, Alicia. You look ... damn, you look good.

She smiles shyly. Walks him through the crowd. People notice them, but no one stares or gawks. It's a fabulous crowd - The Thing is just one of many marvels here.

ALICIA
I'm glad you came. Wasn't sure you would.

THING
Think I'd stand up a girl like you?

ALICIA
I've been stood up by the best. You'd be surprised. I just meant ... I know you had a hard day. It's all over the news. The accusations. Eviction. Lawsuits ...

THING
Listen, Alicia. This is our first date, right? So do me a favor. Try not to ruin it with a lot of Fantastic Four yappin'.

Ben grabs and gulps another passing tray of hors d'oevres.

ALICIA
All right. But hey. Don't tell me I "yap," okay? I do not "yap." My grandmother had a little yappie dog, went yap-yap-yap all over the yard, and I hated that dog. Tried to kick it over a fence once.

THING
How'd that work out for you?

ALICIA
Missed - sprained an ankle - thanks for asking. Are we gonna have fun tonight or not?

THING
Fun's what I'm here for. Now that I quit the super heroing business ...

He grabs a bottle of champagne from a passing waiter, starts drinking straight from the bottle.

THING
I'm all about the fun.

ALICIA
Business? Ben. I thought the Fantastic Four were, you know. More than that to you. That they were like ... family.

THING
Phht, they're not my family, whatever they are. They're like co-workers or something. Teammates, maybe. Associates. Yeah. That's it.

ALICIA
I don't believe you.

THING
Why not?

ALICIA
I'm blind, not stupid.

Awkward pause. Alicia frowns as Ben guzzles champagne and grabs his third hors d'oevres tray. This isn't going well.

ALICIA
Would it be too much to ask, you leave some food for the guests?

She takes the bottle from him, puts it back on another passing waiter's tray.

THING
Uh-huh. So, what, you want me to mingle, is that it?

ALICIA
It'd be nice.

THING
Like show and tell.

ALICIA
I was thinking more like a date.

THING
You want to show me off to all your fancy art world friends, don't you? Bet you told 'em I was coming. And they bought tickets.

ALICIA
Has anyone bothered you tonight?

THING
Nah, they're all very discreet.

ALICIA
Maybe because they're not interested. Look around. Everyone here's an artist, which means everyone here's a freak, and the only one in the room obsessed with your pain - is you.

As she says this - Flash! - a PHOTOGRAPHER takes their picture, momentarily blinding The Thing. Acting on instinct, The Thing lashes out - and crunches the camera to splinters in his fist. The photographer splits.

ALICIA
(continuing)
Jesus, Ben, what's wrong with you?
(beat)
You're acting like a monster!

This freezes The Thing where he is. Everyone in the room is staring at them. Alicia speaks softly:

ALICIA
I didn't mean that the way it ... look. You want to be free? You're free. You're the only one who can decide who you're gonna be.

THING
Not the only one.

EXT. LATVERIAN EMBASSY - NIGHT

The Thing's big rocky fist pounds on ornate carved wooden doors - of the Latverian embassy. Nothing happens. He begins to pound again when the door opens. Unlocked.

INT. LATVERIAN EMBASSY - NIGHT

Inside the embassy. The Thing passes the big empty main hall - his footsteps echoing. He walks through the library, then the conference room, still littered with styrofoam cups, folding chairs and the detritus of Victor's press conference.

Finally he comes to a small room in back. The Servant's Station. And sees, sitting alone, a silhouette. Victor. Seen from behind, huddled over some vodka and a glass. Victor's drinking alone. The Thing, curious, walks around to face Victor directly.

THING
Vic?

VICTOR
Hello, Ben. I hoped you would come.

The Thing sits across from Victor. Victor looks up. His hood is retracted; the mask is gone - Victor's face is smooth, unscarred, and handsome.

THING
Yeah. You look good.

VICTOR
Drink?

Victor reaches for a glass - knocking over his own vodka. Sloppy drunk.

THING
Whoa, whoa, Vic - this stuff's no good for you.

The Thing takes the vodka bottle away.

THING
I come to talk.

VICTOR
Good! I'm feeling extremely honest today.

THING
Okay ... what's up with the whole Phantom of the Opera deal?

VICTOR
(smiles)
Fate - and cruelty - come in many guises, my friend. You, for example. You're a monster! You wake up a hideous mockery of the human condition, you go to bed the same.

The Thing is stunned - nobody's talked to him like that ever

VICTOR
I, on the other hand, retain my American tabloid good looks for five, sometimes ten minutes at a time. And then it happens.

THING
What happens?

VICTOR
My achievement fails me, the clock strikes midnight, and like Cinderella at the ball, the fairy tale ends. And I am reminded of the last time I trusted Reed Richards.

As Victor says this - his face begins to transform back into its natural state. Flesh melts, sags, loses shape. Seams o skin and old scars split open, run ...

The Thing, watching, takes a swig from the vodka bottle.

VICTOR
They tell us, when we're trained as doctors and men of science, never to kill. That life itself is sacred. But when I think of Reed Richards and what he has done to us, I ... I ... Ben, God help me, I want to kill him.

Victor fumbles to find the mechanism at the base of his skul which activates the mask. Finally gets it. The mask covers his face and, like he's just gotten medication - he calms.

VICTOR
Forgive me. I am not myself.
(beat)
You came to talk.

THING
It's okay. I can see you got problems of your own ...

The Thing gets up to leave. Victor grabs his arm.

VICTOR
No. Stay. I- I've been so alone.

THING
Since the accident.

VICTOR
Yes!

THING
I know the feeling.

VICTOR
Do you? But - I thought - you were happy. Well-adjusted. You've got friends. Fans. The love of a "family" like the Fantastic Four.

THING
Don't make me puke. I thought I knew 'em. Reed most of all. Tell me something, Vic. Why'd a guy like Reed Richards do something like that? Experimenting on humans. Making ... super soldiers?

As The Thing asks Victor this, he pours two glasses of vodka. One for himself, one for his host.

VICTOR
Reed's like me. He is in love with the future. And in his future, like every future, there's power - and the fight to keep it. Now other people have weapons - nuclear, chemical, biological ... but in Reed Richards' future, genetically enhanced soldiers will be all one man would need ... to keep the world in line. And have more power than any man on earth.

THING
That's some twisted shit.

VICTOR
I'd dare say.

They drink.

THING
Well I don't want any part of it. I just want to be a regular guy. And that's what I come here to ask you. Vic? Can you keep Reed's promise?

VICTOR
I don't know. What did he promise?

THING
Turn me back. Make me human. For good. I can't take this monster stuff one more day and if he's using us that's even more reason to ...

VICTOR
I'm sorry. I can't.

Pause. The Thing takes this in. Thinks about the last year.

THING
It's impossible. Isn't it?

VICTOR
Theoretically, no. But someone, somehow, would have to re-create a million-to-one event - build a controlled, sustainable particle wave device ... and that's the stuff of science fiction. It exists nowhere on this planet.

Long, silent pause. The first shafts of dawn's light slash in through the blinds. Ben smiles at the new day, thinking.

THING
You wanna come play at my house?

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING - CORRIDOR - DAY

The Thing and Victor stride side-by-side down the main Baxter Building security hallway.

COMPUTER
Welcome to Baxter Building Security software. Please state your ...

Wham! Without looking or breaking stride, The Thing punches the nearest computer panel to bits.

THING
What makes you sure you can do what Reed couldn't after a year of trying?

VICTOR
Two things. He wasn't really trying. And this:

Victor holds up a small metallic device.

THING
Your cell phone?

VICTOR
A stabilizer. One of the many projects I nearly completed before the accident. If my theory is correct - and it is - this is the missing ingredient which will make your transformation permanent.

They reach the Transformation Chamber together. The Thing presses a series of buttons on the keypad.

THING
After you, Doctor.

The pneumatic door hisses open ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

Reverse angle revealing Victor and Ben at the Transformation Chamber entrance. But Victor cannot move - at first. He's too in awe of Reed's Wave Machine. He takes a few tentative steps towards the device - its glow casting light on his masked face.

VICTOR
God, he really did it. Reed's ultimate dream. Controlling the uncontrollable.

THING
You really think he'd use it to make, you know ... more guys like me?

VICTOR
An army of them, I'm sure of it.

Victor just stares as if hypnotized by the swirling surges of power. Then, snapping out of it, he turns to The Thing.

VICTOR
We should act quickly.

THING
Don't have to ask me twice.

The Thing straps himself into the oversized metallic shackles. Victor examines Reed's console - then activates the stabilizer - and attaches it to the console.

THING
All set?

VICTOR
Indeed.

THING
Then let 'er rip.

VICTOR
Before we do, Benjamin, I feel morally bound to ask you: are you sure you want to do this?

THING
What are you, one of those retarded geniuses? Yeah I want to do this.

VICTOR
You do understand, once I activate this device, there'll be no turning back. You will regain humanity, but you will also sacrifice your power as The Thing - forever.

THING
You always talk this much? Do it.

As Reed did before, Victor activates the Generator. Waves of pure, uncontrolled energy pour across the wires, directly into The Thing's shackled body. The screaming begins ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

Reed stands surrounded by microphones, reporters, angry fans, his landlord ... and they all want answers. As Reed talks, he backs up, toward the elevators. The mob closes in.

REPORTERS
Reed! Is it true? What have you got up there? If you have nothing to hide, why all the secrecy? Is the Fantastic Four splitting up?

REED
All I can tell you is, Victor Von Doom is a lying, dangerous man. I don't know his agenda - but I assure you, he's got one and - what's that?

Reed is cornered by Agents Thomas and Perez. Thomas holds up the charred remains of a still-intact mechanical Bug.

AGENT THOMAS
You gave us probable cause.

AGENT PEREZ
We got the warrant.

Beat. The pneumatic elevator doors shut on Reed, sealing out the crowd. They rush the elevator, pounding on the doors ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

The Thing roars in agony as his entire body is bathed in an inferno of particle waves. We see what it's like when Victor performs this experiment - without Sue's containment field, particle waves rage throughout the room like a wild fire, blackening walls, melting some of the equipment and burning holes in the walls, exposing the New York skyline ...

And then it stops. The Thing's rocky features change shape, coagulating into ... Ben Grimm.

Ben, too small for the Thing-sized electrodes, falls hard to the ground. He lies there a moment. Victor shuts off the equipment. Ben feels his face, his arms, his hands ... he looks up to Victor, and smiles.

BEN
You sure this is permanent?

VICTOR
So long as you stay away from particle waves, you'll be human forever. Congratulations

And Victor suddenly punches Ben in the face.

Ben lands hard - checks his mouth - blood. He looks up.

VICTOR
The first man on earth to go from super-powered to human to dead, all in a few short hours.

Victor strides forward. Ben crawls back, to his feet...

VICTOR
What is it that you wanted from humanity? Was it the frailty? Mortality? The disease, imperfections ...?

Victor catches Ben by the throat and pulls him close.

VICTOR
Or was it the weakness?

Victor throws Ben hard up against a wall. Victor keeps coming. Ben makes a stand - punches Victor - connects with metal armor - and nearly breaks every bone in his hand.

VICTOR
You never were smart, Benjamin, but at least you were strong. And loyal. So tell me.

Victor backhands Ben across the face, sending Ben crashing through a pile of gadgets on a lab table ...

VICTOR
What are you now?

Desperate, Ben rifles through the scientific equipment around him, looking for a weapon as Victor approaches ...

VICTOR
Yes! Good thinking! Technology will save you. That's what it's there for, to help humans forget all their limitations. With the right tools you could kill me. Or call for help.

Ben finds Reed's digital "comlink" communicator. He presses buttons frantically, but the device won't work.

VICTOR
... If only Reed had designed your comlink for *human* hands.

Victor approaches Ben. Ben digs into the pile of gadgets and pulls out - a GUN. Big, nasty-looking. Not one that fires bullets, that's for sure. Victor stops.

BEN
Laugh this off, tin man.

Ben fires. A blast of pure energy hits Victor square in the chest. And his armor simply absorbs it.

VICTOR
(deadpan)
Ha. Ha.

Lightning-fast, Victor rips Ben's entire body up off the floor and throws him, hard, towards the elevator shaft. Ben's body hits the doors with a sickening crunch. They open. Ben's limp body totters ... and falls in.

INT. ELEVATOR BANKS - DAY

Ben's motionless body lies, bloody and battered, atop the elevator as it slowly, automatically descends.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

Victor's busy already. He expertly manipulates a series of buttons on Reed's console. The Wave turns itself back on with a terrifying rush of noise and energy.

Victor stands before the contained, man-made inferno and begins to walk through it - when it suddenly shuts off.

And Choom! Choom! Choom! Every enormous door frame in the room slams down automatically, sealing Victor in. Victor does not move. Does not turn around. Nor does he sound surprised when he says:

VICTOR
Hello, Reed.

REED (O.S.)
Hello, Victor.

Victor turns to see Reed at the other end of the room. The two men stand opposed, amidst the room filled with oversized machines, far apart, like gunfighters. They take their time.

REED
Looks like you managed to fool just about everyone.

VICTOR
Ah, but not you.

REED
I'm a genius. And you inflicted lots of damage for a dead man. Split my team. Turned a world against me. And now you're trying to steal the most dangerous machine on the planet.

As they speak they walk closer to one another, each man cautious, each ready for violence, sizing each other up ...

VICTOR
I didn't break up your little super group, Reed. They were all ready to split when I arrived. I merely tapped in the right place ...
(gestures)
... and away they flew.

REED
What do you want, Victor?

As Victor speaks, his face reverts to its horror.

VICTOR
Everything you've taken from me. The toys. The fame. But most of all, the super powers you lucked into. First for me. Then my royal guard. Then hundreds. Then thousands. A Latverian Army. Under my rule. Latveria. No longer a joke but the truest super power on earth ...

REED
At last. The ugly truth.

VICTOR
Wrong again, Reed. For you see ...

Victor's mask automatically begins to fold over his face, pushing the misshapen lumps of flesh back into place, and covering his face ... leaving only the mask.

He calms down again. Speaks in modulated tones.

VICTOR
Truth is beauty.

REED
Victor, we all changed up there, but this is what we are now. I struggle to accept it myself. It's not too late. If we work together, we can find a cure for you.

VICTOR
Who said I want to be cured? I just want to get better.

They keep circling, getting closer, violence now inevitable.

REED
I'm offering you humanity.

VICTOR
Keep it.

REED
We don't have to fight.

VICTOR
Yeah, but wouldn't it be fun?

REED
You can't win, Victor.

VICTOR
What are you going to do? Stretch at me?

REED
I don't need my own power. This is the Baxter Building. It's got the collective force of a small nuclear nation, and I control it.

VICTOR
Are you sure?

As Victor says this - the lights all flicker. And with them, a small look of worry flickers across Reed's face ...

VICTOR
I got in a little face time with your mainframe computer. It's wonderfully cooperative. And I spent over a year on the suit. You know, it doesn't just look good ...

Victor's presses a panel in his chest plate, and suddenly, like some Samurai from Hell, his armored suit activates - humming with nuclear power. Chest plate, gauntlets and boots all fold over one another, transforming into full-tech battle armor. Deadly-looking retro cannons shoot up from each forearm.

VICTOR
It's functional.

Victor aims a forearm blaster at Reed. Fires. Reed takes the explosion straight in the chest. The force is enormous. His entire back blows out like a twenty-foot balloon, and for the first time - his elastic skin bursts.

Reed screams in agony. His body re-forms to its normal shape but he's bleeding from the shoulder, a hole ripped in his uniform.

REED
Victor ...

VICTOR
Oh just shut up and fight.

Victor aims his other arm at Reed and a series of high-caliber bullets blast out of it, machine-gun style. Reed rolls across the floor out of the gunfire's way - bullets stitch holes in the Baxter Building floor.

Reed hides behind a large machine. Victor steps forward, turns, aiming at Reed - except Reed's not there.

Victor gets smashed in the back of the head by an oversized fist, looping its way at him. Victor takes the punch, rolls with it, lands on his feet, turns - and fires a rocket.

Reed stretches his entire body so that the rocket narrowly misses him - but blows apart the bank of machinery behind him. Reed turns back - and Victor punches him.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed comes skidding to a halt on the Baxter Building's main room floor. Victor, a vision of death, leaps upon him, gauntlets extended. Reed reaches out with both arms and grabs Victor by the wrists. They struggle.

Reed is strong. But Victor is stronger. Reed weakens, sinking down to his knees ...

VICTOR
I've spent my time in solitude getting stronger. But you've spent your time pouting. Feeling guilt, eating yourself up from the inside. You've actually gotten weaker, Richards. That astounds me.

Reed lets go with one hand, stretches his arm across the room to activate a distress beacon.

VICTOR
But as discoveries go ...

Victor pulls free from Reed's grip and punches Reed in the face as hard as he can. Reed goes down like a heavyweight hitting the canvas.

VICTOR
I kind of like it.

And the distress beacon flashes emergency red ...

INT. PENTAGON HALLWAY - DAY

A PAGE runs down the Pentagon hallway, fast as he can, tie flapping behind him, holding a sheet of paper ...

INT. PENTAGON WAR ROOM - DAY

The Page rushes into the War Room, where assembled Pentagon brass stand in mid-session.

PAGE
Sir! We're getting a signal. It's from the Baxter Building.

Pause. All eyes turn to the GENERAL at the head of the room. (We've seen him before - being interviewed at the beginning of the movie). The General looks down, grim ...

GENERAL
You know what to do.

EXT. AIR FIELD TARMAC - DAY

A team of F-16 FIGHTER PILOTS scramble, running across the tarmac, pulling on flight helmets as they go. They leap into cockpits which clamp down on them automatically. The team of F-16s takes off into the bright blue sky.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed Richards screams in agony. Electric blue shock waves run all through his body. We see Reed is on his knees on the Baxter Building floor. Victor holds both of Reed's hands in his iron gauntlets, crushing Reed's fists. Victor sends electric shock waves through his armor, into Reed's body. It is killing him.

VICTOR
Hurts, doesn't it? It should. Fifty thousand volts, roughly twice the amount of kinetic energy your elastic body can absorb. I should know.

Victor electrocutes Reed again, sending waves of energy crackling and swirling all around his body.

VICTOR
I studied.

He shocks him again.

INT. ELEVATOR BANKS - DAY

Ben, battered and swollen, slowly opens his eyes. He looks around, getting his bearings ...

He sees he is lying atop the stopped elevator. He slides off, groaning, to the side, climbs down a small ladder ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

Ben emerges from a small utility closet beside the elevators. Stunned, he walks through the Baxter Building lobby, passing the throng of reporters, still clutching his comlink. People see him, looking ragged, appearing drunk ... and they steer clear of him, just as they did The Thing.

INT. ALICIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ben picks the locks to Alicia's apartment. Kicks the door in with the last of his human strength (it takes more than one), and finally snaps the chain lock. Desperate, he rushes in, goes through her art supplies, her tools, until he finds ...

The plastic baggie containing a single chip of innocuous orange rock. A piece of The Thing. Ben upends the plastic baggie and drops the chip into his hand.

Carefully, he presses the chip of rock to the comlink's buttons. Nothing happens. Then, the comlink's electronic face lights up ...

INT. ALICIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

Alicia comes in, holding a bag of groceries. She stops at her doorway - knows it's open. She approaches the open door slowly, cautiously ...

ALICIA
Hello? Hello? ...

She enters her apartment - to find it empty.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Reed slams hard to the ground, nearly dead. Victor stands over him. Reed looks up:

REED
Victor ... I know you'll kill me no matter what I say. But understand. I never knew what that Particle Wave would do to us.

Victor stops. Genuinely surprised.

VICTOR
I know you didn't. I did.

Reed is stunned. Victor goes on.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Why do you think I went up in space with you in the first place? Why do you think I would allow myself to be your "second in command?"
(beat)
I'm smarter than you, Reed. Always have been.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

Ben Grimm strides through the phalanx of reporters and onlookers and tourists, shoving his way through them all, until he reaches ...

Mr. Buscema. Ben grabs his landlord by the shoulders, and talks to him with the piercing intensity of the insane.

BEN
Hey, buddy. Wanna save the world? Tell me you know me.

Mr. Buscema looks at Ben like he's nuts. Still ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Víctor tortures Reed with electric shocks.

VICTOR
I knew the Wave could revolutionize the way we lived.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Ben rides in silence beside Mr. Buscema (who's holding a landlord-sized ring of keys). Victor's voice over continues.

VICTOR (V.O.)
For the first time in history, we could be more than merely human.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

Ben enters the large, lonely room. Absently hits a switch - and The Wave ignites to life. Ben watches the raging, man-made inferno, his face expressionless, almost angelic. A decision needs to be made ...

VICTOR (V.O.)
(continuing)
Naturally, I wanted to go first.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Victor leans his masked face in close towards Reed, intimately, telling his story ...

VICTOR
But when my moment of glory came, you did something that truly surprised me. You got stupid.

And we flashback to:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DATA CENTER - DAY

Victor studies human DNA patterns. We see the shuttle crew reacting to the particle wave as it expands upon them, growing, approaching ... We see Reed and Victor argue:

VICTOR
Go in!

REED
Go back!

We see Ben hesitate at the controls ...

VICTOR (V.O.)
Your crew nearly turned on you. And you tried to rescue us. You wanted to be the hero. ...

We see Reed fight with Victor, throw him into the escape pod.

VICTOR (V.O.)
The only thing you didn't know was...

We see Victor pounding on the glass of the escape pod as the accidental explosion forces its doors shut.

VICTOR (V.O.)
I didn't want to be rescued.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

Victor's escape pod hurtles away from the ship, further and further from the shuttle being consumed by the wave ...

VICTOR (V.O.)
I went into space to have that wave run through me. Change me. Turn me into something better and stronger than a thousand centuries of evolution. Would have worked, too.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Victor, speaking through his hideous metal death mask, speaks in a normal tone of voice:

VICTOR
Until you grew a backbone.

He sends another shock wave through Reed's body. Reed's elastic body begins to lose definition - like his bones have been shattered from within. He's nearly liquid.

REED
Victor, you're so stupid. These powers ... no one wants them. They're a burden. They're a curse.

VICTOR
Now you see, Reed? This is the problem. You got the greatest gift in human history. And you're still not having any fun!

Victor electrocutes Reed again. Reed screams.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Please try.

Reed cannot get up. Cannot move. Victor turns, heads toward the Transformation Chamber, satisfied Reed poses no threat.

VICTOR
(continuing)
Watch, Reed, and the last thing you'll see before you die is what a man looks like when he embraces his destiny, instead of runs from it. This is my time.

The pneumatic doors whoosh open. A cloud of steam emerges from the room. And we hear a growling voice from within:

THING (O.S.)
Actually, Vic ...

And THE THING emerges from the steam. Not Ben Grimm - The Thing: three tons of pissed-off rock from New York City.

THING
... It's clobberin' time.

Boom! The Thing punches Victor so full-force hard, Victor's entire metal-clad body smashes through one, two, three solid walls in the Baxter Building - crashing out of sight.

The Thing turns to Reed. Reed looks dead. The Thing kneels beside his leader, cradling his head ...

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - TRANSORMATION CHAMBER - DAY

The Wave is clasped by a series of automatic pulleys. They lift it up, through the irising ceiling, toward the roof ...

EXT. NEW YORK SKYLINE - DAY

F-16s zoom past the landmark skyscrapers, heading towards the Baxter Building ... we see, on the roof, The Wave being loaded into a stealth helicopter.

TEAM LEADER
Eagle squad, on my mark - open fire. Mark!

The F-16s open fire on the Baxter Building's roof - aiming for The Wave. But the building is instantly surrounded by a shimmering blue ion shield. Bullets are useless.

TEAM LEADER
(continuing)
Shields are up - we're not penetrating - we ...

It's a sentence he'll never finish. A bolt of blue energy blasts its way out of the ion shield and engulfs his entire aircraft. The plane explodes.

EXT. BAXTER BUILDING ROOF - DAY

Victor watches as the planes scream overhead. Some make it past - most explode. The building is set on auto-defense.

The roof floor automatically opens and the Wave appears. A series of winches and clamps load it into Victor's waiting stealth helicopter.

Victor gets behind the copter's controls. Sees a digital image readout of the Wave, locked into his cargo hold. The words "CARGO LOADED" flash. Victor starts the engines. Rotor blades begin to spin, building speed.

INT. BAXTER BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON: Reed. Barely alive, let alone conscious, his head cradled in a big orange rock paw.

Reed fights to open his eyes. He wins this fight. He looks up, and we see what he sees: By his side, surrounding him - is not only The Thing ... but Johnny and Sue beside him.

Reed cannot speak. Sue reaches out to him, tenderly takes his hand. Then Johnny puts his hand atop Sue's. And The Thing places his hand atop theirs. The four united.

REED
Why ... why did you ...?

The three exchange looks.

THING
If we gotta explain it to ya, big brains, you're never gonna get it.

Reed grins to himself ... when the entire building shudders. Reed and the others look around their shaking home, worried.

REED
Victor wants to change the world. He's got to beat us to do it. He knows our every weakness.

Reed gets to his feet. Takes the tone of a true commander:

REED
(continuing)
Let's show him our strength.

EXT. SKIES OF MANHATTAN - DAY

The F-16s watch Victor's stealth helicopter take off.

PILOT
Chopper leaving the base, sir. Pursue?

As the question is asked, a set of nuclear-powered thrusters emerge beneath the helicopter and it blasts away - fast.

COMMANDER
Negative - negative, nothing I know can catch that. It's over.

ANGLE ON: The stealth helicopter as it races past the skyscraper tops of Manhattan. It's going to make a clean getaway - the East River in view. Almost free ...

When suddenly - a fire bolt blazes across the sky and hits the helicopter's back rotor blades. The blades melt on contact. The stealth copter spins insanely out of control, whirring, spinning like a top, going down the whole time ...

Revealing The Human Torch, hovering in mid-air, watching.

JOHNNY
Gotcha.

INT. STEALTH HELICOPTER - DAY

Victor fights with the controls but they will not budge or cooperate. He keeps going down, down, toward the streets ...

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - DAY

The helicopter crashes onto the streets of midtown Manhattan. Sending BYSTANDERS scattering from the wreckage.

The Fantasticar, catching a glint of sunlight, descends immediately upon the streets - right in front of the crashed copter. Reed, Sue, Johnny and The Thing, standing together, braced for combat, face the crashed copter. No one moves.

Then: The copter explodes, sending flaming shards of burning metal in every direction. And all that's left standing there is Victor, battle armor humming with energy. Behind him, still intact, is The Wave. And he's ready to die for it.

Reed issues commands without taking his eyes off Victor:

REED
Team: Work together - use your powers. All of 'em. Anyone holds back, you're fired. And Susan?

Reed grins like we've never seen before:

REED
Go nuts.

Sue smiles a bad-ass smile, spreads her arms - and sends invisible shock waves rushing from her fingertips, pouring down into the street itself. The entire New York City street ripples like a living wave, heading toward Victor. Gravel and concrete bits go flying off at the crest - until the street hits Victor, literally pulling the ground out underneath him. Victor falls. Sue turns to Reed.

SUE
Oh, that felt *good*.

JOHNNY
Flame on!

Johnny ignites and flies up. Arching his entire body, really throwing himself into it, Johnny fires a blast of white-hot flame bolts, shooting straight into Victor's metallic body.

The flames engulf Victor. He screams and writhes under the heat - but not for long. Activating a hidden panel, a small rectangular device morphs out his back armor panel and ignites with a nuclear green glow: Jet pack.

Victor blasts off - eluding Reed Richards' elongated grip.

Victor flies up, his suit now in flaming tatters, and heads straight for Johnny. Grabs him. And in mid-air, two stories above the crowd, Victor and Johnny exchange fast-and-furious punches to the head, ribs, and face. Victor punches Johnny so hard it whips the kid's head sideways, nearly taking it clean off. Johnny's flame goes out - he falls.

Reed stretches out his arms and catches Johnny safely, just barely able to cushion the deadly fall to the sidewalk.

Victor changes direction, heading for the Wave - but he is suddenly stopped mid-air by a shimmering invisible barrier that springs up around him, trapping him like a bug.

SUE
Where you think you're going?

The barrier contracts - and Victor is brought crashing to the ground by Susan, so hard bits of street jar loose around him.

Victor turns and aims an arm-cannon at Sue. She just smiles - and disappears. Victor misses, the rocket races down a side street towards the river ...

Victor turns to see The Thing standing behind him. The Thing punches Victor square in the face with a 300 pound fist.

EXT. SKIES OF MANHATTAN - DAY

The F-16 fighter squad flies overhead the battle scene. Looking down, the squad commander lets out a relieved smile.

COMMANDER
Eagle squad - Pull back. Repeat, pull back. This fight belongs to the Fantastic Four.

The entire squad, what's left of it, banks on a dime and turns a 180-degree arc, away from New York ...

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - DAY

One nervous-looking ONLOOKER tries to get into his Mercedes as the fight rages all around him.

The poor guy just wants to get away ...

When The Thing comes crashing into frame, having just been punched real hard by Victor. The Thing lies sprawled on the pavement. But he's having his fun, like a tough kid in the middle of a football game. He leaps to his feet, looks around, bends low to the terrified onlooker and asks:

THING
Can I borrow your car?

The guy offers The Thing his car keys. The Thing just grabs the entire car instead ...

THING
Thanks.

The Thing lifts the whole Mercedes up over his head and smashes Victor with it. Victor activates a heating device in his armor which rips through the metal, burning it off him, and confronts The Thing directly ...

The Thing and Victor exchange blows - it's the battle of the Titans. Every punch rocking the combatants and the street they stand upon. It's like the whole city rocks with every punch and counter-punch.

Victor finally lands a nuclear-powered blow which sends The Thing into a lamp post across the street. The post cracks at its base and comes crashing down.

Victor turns back to the Wave. But standing in his way is Reed. And for the first time in his life - Reed wants to play. Victor fires at him. Reed stretches. Victor misses.

REED
Oops! Missed me.

Victor fires again. Reed curves. Victor misses.

REED
Missed again.

Victor grows increasingly frustrated with Reed's playful defense. He keeps firing and missing as Reed keeps bending in different shapes. Pretzel. Octagon. Smiley-face. Reed's having fun. He talks as they fight:

REED
Missed. Wo-ho! Try again.
Slowpoke.

Then, in the middle of their fight, Reed gets ... chatty.

REED
You know, Victor. I've been thinking. This whole "in solitude lies strength" thing - well, yeah! Of course you think that! Because you're always alone. And you're always alone because you've got no friends. And you've got no friends because Victor? You're such an asshole.

Victor grabs hold of Reed. His armor starts crackling with electricity, preparing to shock the life out of Reed ...

REED
And there's still one thing I have that you haven't.

VICTOR
Your little "family?"

REED
A lot of leverage.

Victor sees that Reed is holding the metal "arm" of the fallen lamp post - a hunk of metal the size of a baseball bat - held twenty feet away. The metal comes whistling toward Victor at unbelievable speed and growing velocity ...

Victor gets hit so hard he rockets across Fifth Avenue.

And before he can land, a curved chute of invisible air guides his trajectory so he slides 90 degrees - and smashes into a fire hydrant. On impact, the hydrant bursts open, spewing water and soaking Victor's metal armor ...

Victor stands - his armor has become tattered at the seams. We can see melted flesh - and some blood - beneath the armor.

Enraged, Victor fires rockets indiscriminately, screaming, going berserk. Reed and Sue erect barriers around the gathering crowd - Sue with force fields, Reed with his body. No one gets hurt - but it's getting deadly out here.

Victor does not notice as The Thing slams his giant rocky paw straight through the sidewalk cement - and pulls up a bundle of sputtering electrical cables - and jams them straight into Victor's wet metal suit.

The entire electrical power of New York City courses through Victor's body. Screaming, electrified, terrifying ... Victor whirls on The Thing and fires a blast at him - just as Johnny melts his rocket launcher barrels with a blast of flame. The blast is blocked - nearly blowing Victor's arms off. He stands a bloody mess. Victor's mask is gone - revealing a face half-handsome and half melted.

Victor goes for the Wave's metallic frame. But Reed gets it first - and tosses it to The Thing. They play "keepaway."

Victor rushes The Thing - who tosses the Wave to Johnny. Johnny flies the Wave up into the sky. Victor follows. Johnny drops the Wave. Sue catches it with an invisible force-cushion. But Victor snatches the Wave - and lands upon the street, holding it.

The Fantastic Four surround Victor. Reed steps forth.

REED
Four against one, Victor. Where's your strength now?

VICTOR
As always, Reed, I find it ...

Victor pulls a set of wires from what's left of his metallic forearm. Plugs them into the Wave's frame ...

VICTOR
... Within myself.

And - Fwoom! - Victor activates the Wave, its metal frame bursting to life, undulating with deadly energies.

REED
Everybody back off. This one's mine.

Reed reaches out lighting-fast, grabs The Wave. Victor holds on. They struggle for control of the device, its deadly energy casting an unnatural glow upon both combatants.

Reed loses. Victor pulls the Wave down upon himself, coating his entire body with the energy of the Particle Wave. Reed steps back, gesturing for the others to do the same ...

REED
(continuing)
You were right, Victor. You're smarter than I am. Always have been.

Victor rises, literally dripping with power. He gets to his feet, feeling the power of the transformation flow through him. The Fantastic Four step away from Victor as he begins to change. Within his armor, his body begins to broil and writhe, mutating, taking on a life of its own ...

When something starts to go horribly wrong ...

Victor screams as his body begins to tear itself apart from within with unstoppable, horrible force.

REED
(continuing)
Of course, if you'd really done your homework you'd know re-coagulating living tissue creates an unstable platform for sub-atomic transfiguration - and exposing yourself to particle waves would tear you apart internally.
(beat)
Dumb-ass.

Screeching out a rattling death scream, Victor's body continues to vibrate with enough violence to pull itself apart, the force growing until Victor's armored body explodes, setting off a series of separate, smaller explosions fueled by the multitude of weapons contained within his armor. Sue erects an invisible barrier just in time to protect the Fantastic Four from the explosion of bio-mechanical debris.

Long, silent pause.

Finally The Thing steps forward, reaches down and picks something up. Hands it to Reed. Johnny and Sue gather around. The four of them stand together looking down upon:

Victor's mask, still leering, as if mocking them. There is a moment of silence for the dead.

SUE
We can't all be super powers.

Reed nods, somber. This solemnity doesn't last long, however - as the Fantastic Four hear a once-familiar sound - one that's growing. It's the sound of applause. The Fantastic Four look around to see they stand surrounded - the New York streets filled with their multitude of FANS.

THING
Aw, here we go again.

JOHNNY
Incoming!

SUE
Shall we?

The Fantastic Four make a run for the Fantasticar as the crowd rushes after them like the stars they are. Even the COPS who are supposed to be holding them back join in. The Thing spots Alicia trying to get through the crowd.

ALICIA
Ben! BEN!

THING
Aw, call me what I am, honey.

He sweeps Alicia up in his big rocky arms and kisses her.

THING
I'm The Thing.

He easily lifts her up above the crowd and into the Fantasticar, then hits the controls. The Fantasticar rises up, above the fans, who stand cheering below, holding up hastily-constructed "I♡FF" banners.

EXT. SKIES OF MANHATTAN - DAY

Johnny drops autographed 8x10 photos onto the crowd. The Fantasticar flies up, rising over the skyscrapers of Manhattan, and blasts off into the shimmering New York skyline. All that's left is the perfect blue sky. And upon it comes written the immortal words:

"'Nuff Said!"

THE END